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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the four issues of this serial issued during 1992. Issue number 44 contains five articles: "Concerns and Fears" (issues raised by the proposed Further and Higher Education Bill in Britain); "Speaking Out for Wordpower" (Kay); "An Open Door to Mathematics" (Hay); "Literacy Problems and Employment" (Atkinson); and "ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages], Wordpower, and Accreditation" (Crofts). Issue number 45 consists of four articles: "ESOL--Time to Start Afresh?"; "Progression from ABE" (Cookson); "The Nottinghamshire Stag" (Hill); and "Integrated Basic Skills--A Pilot Project" (Stephens, Cole). Issue number 46 contains six articles: "Basic Skills--What Changes?" (issues raised by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992); "C.A.P.E.R.: Children and Parents Enjoy Reading" (Kemp, Neasmith); "Leeds into Work" (Kibble); "Using Wordpower with Groups of Young People" (Snudden); "American Lessons" (Swinney); and "Why Do Students Leave?" (Morris). Issue number 47 consists of five articles: "Basic Skills: A Wide Ranging Service" (more issues raised by the Further and Higher Education Act); "Specific Spelling Difficulties" (Hinchcliffe); "The Springboard Project" (Whiteley); "Conference Report: Conference '92"; and "Allied Steel and Wire" (Williams). The center two pages of each issue, entitled Information, provide brief summaries of noteworthy people, materials, and projects. Reviews of resources and books conclude each issue. (YLB)

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ADULT LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS UNIT NEWSLETTER

NOS. 44-47

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit
London, England

1992

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WINTER
1992

No 44

NEWSLETTER

ALBSU

The Basic Skills Unit

Photo: Stephen Williams

Accrediting communication – in a brewery (see Speaking Out for Wordpower, page 4).

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ORGANISING RESOURCES IN OPEN LEARNING

CONCERNS AND FEARS

The Further and Higher Education Bill currently going through Parliament has generated a good deal of debate. Although the Bill is concerned with a much wider area of education and training than basic skills, some of the proposals will have a major impact on the organisation and funding of our area of work.

As most people know, the timing of the Further and Higher Education Bill makes the future uncertain. The date of the General Election is a source of consistent press speculation as is the likely result. It's also less than clear what effect a change of Government would have on all of the proposals in the Bill. Finally, whilst legislation will set down the broad framework for the organisation and funding of further education, including basic skills, much of the detail will be left to the respective Further Education Funding Councils (in Wales and England) after they have been established.

Our attitude to the proposals in the Bill stems from our dissatisfaction with the current state of provision. What we have today is just not good enough. The scale of provision is too limited, the quality of what is available is too variable and patchy, basic skills is a marginal activity in most areas and the whole area is under-resourced and under-funded. That's not to say that progress has not been made or that some excellent basic skills work doesn't take place or to doubt the commitment and enthusiasm of practitioners. But it is clear that what we have isn't adequate.

Underfunding has been a consistent problem, even though in real terms more is spent on basic skills today than at any time in the last fifteen years. Although it is difficult to be precise, we estimate that under 2% of the total expenditure on further and adult education is spent on basic skills, excluding ESOL which is mainly centrally funded through Section 11. That's about £50 million annually out of total expenditure on further and adult education of approximately £3 billion each year.

The result of this is marginal opportunities for a group of people often viewed as marginal. People seen as non-income generators. Two hours a week provision, short adult education terms, supply unable to keep up with demand, limited numbers and over-stretched staff are all too common features of basic skills provision in much of England and Wales. That's not to say that interesting and exciting development has not taken place. The establishment of Open Learning Centres has added a new option in many areas and provided better resource bases, accreditation has been popular with students and acted as a curriculum generator and staff training has been made more coherent and progressive. These nationally led initiatives have been more than matched by local development, much of which has happened with little if any additional money. Basic skills work in the UK still attracts considerable interest from people in other industrialised countries because of its history of innovation and development. It's doubtful, however, if they look to us because of the scale and resourcing levels of basic skills in this country.

We do support the priority given to basic skills in the Further and Higher Education Bill. We have long campaigned for basic skills to be a statutory responsibility and, whether the Bill goes through or doesn't, we continue to take the view that basic skills provision should be enshrined in legislation. We also support the establishment of basic skills as a priority and we hope that this will be reflected in increased funding. If choices have to be made about what is to be wholly or largely funded by the state, we believe that basic skills – the essential skills for any adult to progress in our society – should be one of the highest priorities.

Even before the Bill was suggested we were committed to encouraging colleges to become more involved in basic skills both for young people on existing college courses and for older people in the community. Colleges have become more involved in recent years and more than 50% of current basic skills students are receiving tuition organised by a college of further education. So it's not as though this is new.

We recognise that much of this has been said before in the Newsletter; we also know that not everyone shares our views and that a consensus doesn't exist about the merits or otherwise of the Bill, even amongst people involved in basic skills. Nor will legislation solve many of the problems we have commented on unless additional resources are made available in the next few years. What might be useful is to outline some of the areas of concern about the future which have been raised with ALBSU in the last few months.

IT WILL BE ALL CENTRALISED IN THE COLLEGE . . .

One of the main fears is that if the Bill goes through all of the community based classes and groups will disappear and every student will be expected to travel to main college buildings. We understand this fear but doubt that it will happen. Few colleges are based on only one site and most don't have a lot of spare rooms in the main college building to use for basic skills even if they wanted to. Furthermore, most colleges understand the need to make provision accessible and are committed to community based classes and groups. Certainly those colleges which are currently responsible for basic skills have shown little intention to centralise all provision, although – and we would encourage this – they have started to try to make college communications and maths workshops more open to people in the community.

ALBSU believes that basic skills must continue as a community based service. People need a variety of learning opportunities within easy reach and many will not feel comfortable going to a large college building. Centralising provision in one place or in one building will not provide the type of service we need to develop and is not likely to meet the 'quality standards' ALBSU is developing for basic skills. Our advice to the Funding Councils would be not to support such narrowly conceived basic skills services; certainly our funding will not be available to support moves to centralise provision.

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IT'S THE END FOR VOLUNTEERS . . .

ALBSU has always supported the involvement of volunteers in basic skills. We have been careful not to encourage the use of volunteers to replace paid staff or to take on jobs normally seen as the responsibility of paid staff, such as managing groups. We have condemned authorities where volunteers have been exploited as a cheap option and where basic skills provision depends on the involvement of unsupported, poorly trained volunteers. We believe that volunteers do bring additional and welcome skills and community involvement to basic skills and have helped to de-mystify an area which has sometimes suffered from professional mystique.

Most colleges, which are already responsible for basic skills in an LEA area or part of an LEAs area, use volunteers in much the same way as adult or community education providers. Only one LEA has consistently refused to use any volunteers (and we respect their long held view, although we don't share it) and they took the same view when basic skills provision was the responsibility of a 'free-standing' adult education service. You may or may not support the involvement of volunteers in basic skills – and the arguments have been well rehearsed over a number of years; the Bill is unlikely to lead to the end of volunteer involvement and certainly, as we understand it, this is not the Government's intention.

IT WILL ALL BE WORK RELATED . . .

ALBSU's work with Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), particularly through our Basic Skills at Work Programme, has led some people to doubt our continued commitment to basic skills provision which is not occupationally or vocationally related. Some practitioners fear that the Bill will ensure that only employment related basic skills will be funded in future.

We have not changed our views. The primary reason for an adult or young person wanting to improve language, reading, writing or basic maths is, in our view, only important in terms of curriculum design and negotiating a 'learning plan'. Wanting to learn is far more important than the initial reason for becoming involved and we do not believe that learning for employment is more or less important than learning for any other reason. Nor should employment related provision be more highly valued than other basic skills work. Basic skills underpin most of the learning and progress made by an individual in our developed, industrialised society and we need well educated parents, citizens, consumers, electors just as much as we need educated well-trained workers.

Although Basic Skills at Work is concerned with employment and vocationally related basic skills, most of our other programmes are not specifically employment related. For instance, we have just established new guidelines for project funding – open and distance learning, short courses and basic skills support in colleges – and there is no intention that the development projects have to be employment related. We remain committed to basic skills work with parents – and hopefully family literacy programmes will begin to develop in the UK as they have in the USA – and we will continue to be a 'broad church' in the future as in the past.

We do not believe that it is the intention of the Bill to only provide funding for employment related basic skills provision. No distinction is made in the reference to basic skills (including ESOL) in Schedule 2 to the Bill and again we understand that such a separation is not intended by the Government. We *will* continue to try to help TECs, training managers, colleges and voluntary organisations making employment related provision to ensure that it is of high quality. Similarly we will continue to help agencies and organisations working with parents, families and community groups to develop high quality learning opportunities. Our commitment is to basic skills not to individual motives for learning.

EVERY STUDENT WILL HAVE TO BE TAKING ACCREDITATION . . .

We remain committed to Wordpower and Numberpower and believe that accreditation of basic skills for adults has been an important development in the last few years. We recognise that some practitioners were against the development of accreditation and had understandable concerns. Of course there have been problems in introducing competence based accreditation and not everything has gone smoothly. Despite these concerns and doubts, accreditation has been popular with students and many practitioners have been happy to introduce Wordpower and Numberpower to interested students. There's still work to do, however. For instance, we have just mapped Wordpower and Numberpower across to the Attainment Targets in the English and Maths National Curriculum because we believe that it will be important for people to know what the value of these qualifications is compared to achievement in the school system.

We don't believe, however, that all basic skills students want or should have to take accreditation. Some students are not interested in obtaining qualification and some others are at a level where any accreditation is a long way off. Nor do we believe that funding should be dependent on whether courses are accredited or not. Accreditation is a valuable option, no more.

IT WILL BE ALL TEACHERS AND NO ORGANISERS . . .

Staff/Student Ratios and class contact hours do sometimes tend to dominate discussion in education. There seems to be an assumption that teachers are only productive when they are actually teaching and that students only learn when the teacher is present. Non-teaching time is sometimes seen as a luxury and a bit of a waste of resources; a spare time activity rather than something essential. It's almost like driving but never spending any time servicing or cleaning the car.

Of course a balance does have to be struck and sometimes the amount of liaison and networking which takes place is completely unrelated to the amount of teaching available. However, unless the organisational aspects of basic skills are preserved, including outreach, publicity, liaison, etc, provision will wither and basic skills will become a 'demand' rather than 'needs' led service. This is the type of service we could not, and would not, support.

There's not the space to deal with every possible concern and, of course, ALBSU does not have control over the funding of basic skills. We do believe, that whilst the Bill does not offer all that we would want – and much is still to play for – higher priority for basic skills can only be a good thing. Some change will be necessary and some new providers will emerge.

What we need to make sure of is that new providers will accept the 'quality standards' which are essential if students and potential students are to get a relevant and effective learning opportunity. We have made it clear that we will not countenance a lowering of standards or a narrowing of basic skills provision. If basic skills are important for the individual, the future health and welfare of our society – and the performance of industry – we need to make sure that opportunities exist for people to improve their skills and that these opportunities are based on sound practice and not on short-term, financial expediency.

A time of change is ahead and we need to meet the challenge to develop a more comprehensive service. Our commitment hasn't changed. We continue to be committed to the development of a community based, broad, student centred basic skills service – well funded, secure and, most importantly, of high quality. ■

SPEAKING OUT FOR WORDPOWER

For many tutors, working on the oral skills in Wordpower has presented a challenge. In this article Elaine Kay, ABE tutor, English workshop, The Friary Community Education Centre, South Glamorgan, describes successful work in Cardiff and gives practical examples of activities they have undertaken.

Student accreditation, in the form of Wordpower, has been welcomed by many tutors as a useful structure for the work carried out within their groups. Its concentration on competences which are at the core of ABE provides a solid foundation upon which to build teaching. For numerous ABE students, preparing for a qualification such as this offers the motivation of an exciting challenge, with choice and control over their work, resulting in recognition for the skills achieved.

After careful consideration of the implications of Wordpower, tutors in South Glamorgan are now committed to the implementation of the certificate. Provision is offered by part-time tutors in a variety of settings – small groups, drop-in Workshops and an Open Learning Centre. The majority of students are working at Foundation and Stage 1, with some interest now being shown in Stage 2.

Oral Skills in Wordpower

Wordpower embraces, on average, six units at each stage. With such a variety on offer, how many of us, either tutor or student, would select one of the oral units for our opening foray into Wordpower? From discussion with local tutors, it would appear that these are the ones often left until last. Almost all tutors agree that they have been difficult to devise and assess.

'Yes, I find them difficult to prepare for... but next time will be easier!'

Yet these very skills of speaking and listening are the ones we use spontaneously every day, from asking where something is in the supermarket to receiving instructions on how to operate machinery at work.

The reasons that we are reluctant to undertake these units would appear to fall into three categories.

- lack of confidence – on the part of both tutor and student
- identification of relevant and meaningful situations
- difficulties of assessment and verification.

It is, of course, much easier to identify such concerns than to offer solutions but this article offers to share some of our experiences in dealing with these important aspects.

Gaining in Confidence

For the majority of tutors, most of the oral units are a relatively new area in which to work. We feel comfortable with the more familiar units involving forms, letter writing and so on but find it difficult to know where to start with 'Establishing Reasons for Actions'.

The experience of tutors in South Glamorgan indicates that only by working with Wordpower can they become thoroughly familiar with it. What appears to be a complex process on paper becomes straightforward in practice. Although the oral units seem more difficult to set up and assess, tutors and students rapidly become adept at exploiting all manner of everyday events. Some students are pleasantly surprised at how well they manage. As one tutor remarked:

'The students are wary at first, but really enjoy these units once they get started – they possibly enjoy them more than those requiring written skills because they are not restricted by handwriting and spelling.'

This may be the case for some, but for many students speaking out in front of other people will always be unnerving. **Confidence** is central to the student's ability to communicate orally – to show flexibility of language skills and the aptitude for fluent expression in a variety of

Photo: Elaine Kay

Giving instructions on using the computer.

situations. To gain this confidence, some time has to be spent considering the communication skills involved.

Preparation

The naturally informal and relaxed atmosphere of any ABE group is an excellent springboard from which to extend existing group oral activities. The first step in preparing oral work will involve discussion, whether in pairs or larger groups, from which each student would be able to pinpoint scenarios appropriate to him/her, by asking the questions:

- **Where?** *Places we go*

At work, in shops, waiting in a queue, in meetings...

- **Who?** *People in our lives*

Friends, colleagues, shop assistants, the doctor, officials...

- **Why?** *A range of purposes*

Asking for information, using the telephone, explaining how to do something...

- **What?** *Topics of conversation*

Passing the time of day, work briefings, giving instructions, advice...

- **How?** *Modes of communication*

Use of voice, body language, employing conversational skills...

The responses should generate a number of suggestions for both practice and assessment contexts. For many students (and this has been our experience), an opportunity to discuss what is required in each context is all that is necessary. However, situations that cause the student concern require more practice. Some students, indeed, may need considerable rehearsal.

Practice

Group activites, such as social skills games, which build self-esteem and confidence can be an important part of preparation, but not everyone finds them easy. They may even have the opposite effect of making the student more tense. However, social skills games and role play, used sensitively, can help to build self-assurance. It is important that the reasons behind their use are explained to the students and, most crucially, that they are always relaxing and fun. Interview skills in particular benefit immensely from role play. A wide variety of useful social skills games to develop a number of areas is to be found in 'Crediting Communication Skills', published by ALBSU. For example:

- **Developing active listening skills by giving and receiving instructions**

Draw a Shape

Students are in pairs, sitting back to back. They have one minute to draw a pattern. One person describes his/her pattern while the other draws a picture from the instructions. Roles are then reversed. When pictures are completed they can then be compared with the originals, leading to discussion about giving instructions.

- **Raising awareness of body language**

Guess the Leader

Players stand or sit in a circle. One person is sent out while a leader is chosen. That person then returns to the centre of the circle. Everyone copies the leader's movements e.g. scratching head, and the player in the centre must try to name the leader.

- **Encouraging students to feel more positive about themselves**

Brag Session

Confidence is essential for effective communication. A group discussion can be geared to helping learners to feel more positive about themselves by telling each other about the things they can do (drive a car, put up shelves etc) and the things they like about themselves.

- **Making aware of skills necessary to fulfil a particular task**

Discussion of these could lead to the compilation of *checklists* to help the student think of what is required to meet the performance criteria with regard to voice, content etc. For example:

- Did you speak clearly?
- Look the person in the eye?
- Sound confident?
- Use words the other person would have understood?

Such checklists are an important part of the learning process and should enable a student to assess strengths and weaknesses and propose areas in which further work may be needed. The students are then encouraged to:

- observe and check each other
- monitor their performances after listening to tape recordings etc. or
- be checked by the tutor.

Again, a comprehensive list of ideas for this is to be found in 'Crediting Communications Skills'.

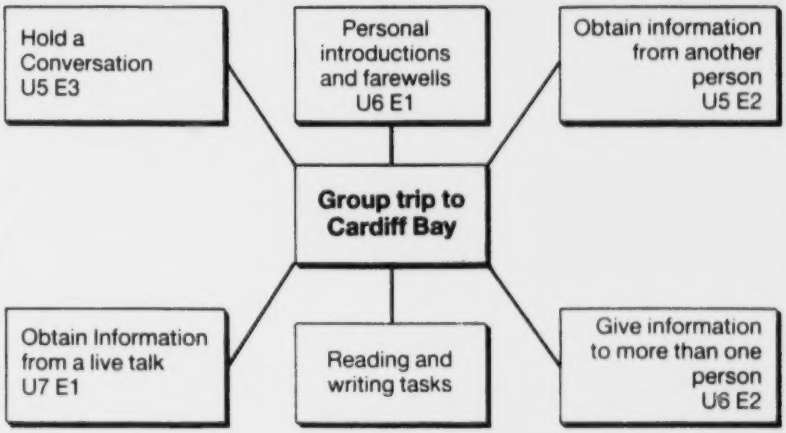
Real Life Situations or Simulations?

Although simulated situations are suggested in the Scheme Pamphlet and can prove useful as a last resort, most tutors agree that they are too contrived, no matter how good the preparation. Students find it difficult to relate and act normally and are often more hesitant in this type of scenario. Our experience has shown the greater benefits of using real and relevant events as much as possible.

The most successful situations appear to be part of a theme or project, using local resources whenever possible and integrating a number of elements from several units.

- Arranging to go out for an end-of-term meal involved
  - finding out when the restaurant was open
  - booking a table by phone
  - confirming the booking by letter
  - showing someone how to get there on a map.
- Theatre visits have generated oral discussion and reviews, a variety of written work, also reading of programmes and newspaper reviews.
- Arranging a visit to a local museum meant telephoning for information about opening times and tour times, using a timetable to plan a journey there, reporting back on the tour information and a number of reading and writing tasks.
- A group outing to a Brewery provided several opportunities to involve Wordpower – reading and writing tasks, listening to a talk, making conversation. One student later had a chance to describe the visit to another ABE group.
- A visit to the Recycling Depot involved
  - writing a letter indicating interest in recycling
  - discussion at the depot – obtaining information
  - writing about the visit
  - having been given a 'waste cone', following instructions on its installation into the ground.
- A number of group talks have been organised and Wordpower students from other parts of the county have been invited. This has encouraged making introductions and holding a conversation as well as extracting information from the talks.

A group trip around Cardiff Bay was particularly successful with regard to the number of oral units covered at Stage 1. Roy found out about the tour from Cardiff Bus and explained to the group the details of the itinerary, departure point, time and so on. During the tour, interaction with others in the coach (discreetly observed by the tutor) covered a number of elements, and finally the live commentary given by the tour guide enabled the student to take notes and report back.


Hold a Conversation U5 E3
Personal introductions and farewells U6 E1
Obtain information from another person U5 E2
Group trip to Cardiff Bay
Obtain Information from a live talk U7 E1
Reading and writing tasks
Give information to more than one person U6 E2

Assessment

Perhaps the greatest concern is how best to assess. The problems of assessment within a busy group are uppermost. Not every ABE group meets in an ideal venue. The tutor often has to learn to contend with carrying out oral assessments in a busy group with no access to a quiet area. Not everyone within an ABE group is necessarily involved with Wordpower. However, the use of group work is particularly advantageous for these units and all willing members of the group can be included. The informal oral units at Foundation and Stage 1 can mean a student just chatting to another student at coffee time, or reassuring a new student – regular events in any group.

We have used instances of a Wordpower student explaining to someone else in the Workshop how to load programmes on the computer (after following the instructions himself), how to work the photocopier, showing a new student round the centre and explaining the procedure for getting coffee. We are also fortunate to have a telephone system which can be used between extensions for practice calls.

For the past two years, the Friary Centre has been temporarily on a split site, which has not always been ideal, but it has meant that Wordpower students are given the opportunity to visit 'the other side' to find out information (often after following a map) and staff there are then able to report back.

Some tutors feel the most successful assessments have been those in which the student was unaware that she/he was being observed. Others, however, have expressed a concern about 'listening in'.

> *"I feel I'm eavesdropping, particularly with 'Holding a conversation' – it's something the student does all the time".*

Evidence

The importance of accumulating evidence to show completion of oral units and how the performance criteria were fulfilled has been particularly emphasised. We are encouraged to:

- write up extensive notes
- use photographs
- make tape recordings.

Where assessment is to be completed within the group setting, few problems are created, but many possible incidents can arise spontaneously, with no-one there to say 'Well done. We'll use that for your portfolio'.

It has been suggested that someone connected with the student in work or leisure/social groups could be made familiar with both the required performance criteria and the approach to assessment, so that they could, on occasion, act as assessor. Although this raises a number of issues regarding intrusion, if the student is content, such an approach not only has much to recommend it but has also been found to generate some success. In one instance, the student concerned made the necessary arrangements herself. Alison was attending an enquiry meeting regarding plans which might affect the field where she kept her horses. During question time she was able to raise issues pertinent to her situation and obtain the information that she required. After the meeting she was so pleased with the way she had handled the exchanges that she asked an acquaintance who was there if she would verify in a few words what had taken place.

In contrast, opportunities occur frequently when the student satisfies the required performance criteria but, as the event has arisen spontaneously, there is no way of producing the necessary proof. A case could therefore be made for a tutor with a sound personal knowledge of a student being enabled to accept the student's own assessment for such unobserved tasks.

In Conclusion

Wordpower is designed to meet the individual needs of each student so that each portfolio should be unique to that student. Although material for the oral units should, then, be as exclusive as possible, some useful tips and ideas for development are to be found in 'Crediting Communication Skills', as already mentioned. Among the televison programmes produced by the BBC to support the introduction of the certificate, several focus on oral communication skills – using the telephone, the place of role play, interview techniques and talking within a group.

Student development within the context of Wordpower requires a considerable commitment on the part of everyone concerned but in so doing provides learning opportunities for us as tutors and gives our students a sense of increased confidence, achievement and purpose. ■

Photo: Stephen Williams

Listening to the guide on the trip to the brewery.

AN OPEN DOOR TO MATHEMATICS

Chris Hay, lecturer responsible for students with special educational needs, describes how open access maths works in North Tyneside.

This article explores the changing approach to maths tuition in Adult Basic Education.

When we begin to examine basic numeracy provision offered to adults it becomes apparent that four areas need to be considered to make numeracy provision more accessible:

1. **What help do the students think they require?**
2. **When can they attend?**
3. **How do they wish to learn?**
4. **Where do they wish to work?**

Formal group work does not seem to be the only answer to these questions. In response Adult Basic Education in North Tyneside has been developing an open door policy to maths tuition. It is the aim of this article to outline how this approach works.

Assessment

When a prospective student contacts Adult Basic Education they are offered an initial assessment. It is at this point that the student's wants and needs are discussed and an individual learning plan is negotiated. The tuition, when offered, takes into account the above areas.

As the students start tuition they fill in a weekly record of work completed, and they are encouraged to state how their work is progressing. The weekly record of work, together with discussion, is a valuable tool used to adjust the student's plan of work.

Often a student will indicate a need to reinforce and recap work they have not fully understood, or work found too easy which can be adjusted accordingly.

This process is then consolidated each half-term when an on-going assessment form is filled in by the student (often at home) which provides a valuable insight into the student's progress and future needs.

Outcomes

Students join a maths group on a roll on, roll off basis. Some may only come for a few weeks to brush up their basic skills before an entrance test. Others progress more slowly staying with the group for a much longer period.

This approach has proved to be very successful. A wide range of students can be dealt with in one group, with attendance, learning programme, methods of learning, and where work is completed, all being flexible.

It will be useful at this point to examine in more detail how one particular group has developed.

Group time:	Friday morning 9.30-11.30
Title:	Foundation in Numeracy
No. of students:	11

The Foundation in Numeracy group was set up on traditional student/tutor lines to develop every day maths skills with basic students.

Due to the differing aims and abilities of the students in this group and those subsequently joining, both its structure and methods of work have evolved. At the present time the group caters for the changing demands of the student group. Each student has now negotiated their own learning plan and works towards the goals they have established in co-operation with their tutor.

Group Structure

There are eleven students attending this group regularly, working on the following areas:

(a) Two students are covering the four rules of number, fractions and decimals. After these initial goals are satisfied their plan of work will be re-negotiated.

(b) Four students are working towards City and Guilds 363 Foundation in Numeracy (three have almost finished).

(c) One student has worked through Llewellyn & Greer's 'The Basic Skills' as a foundation to GCSE and is now working through Greer's 'GCSE Mathematics Higher Course' and is using a revision guide. She will hopefully take the exam in June as an external candidate.

(d) Two students are being supported while working towards GCSE.

(e) Students from other groups can use this session to drop off or pick up work.

(f) One student is presently completing City & Guilds 364 assessments.

Student and tutor roles

The principle underpinning this work, is that of the student being the main agent of his/her learning. Previously the course work was directed then implemented by the tutor. Now the student is the focal point of the learning process.

As the student directs his/her own learning, the tutor's role can now be viewed as that of facilitator, being responsive to the expressed wants and needs of the student.

Conclusion

This method of work has evolved to meet the changing demands of students attending Adult Basic Education in North Tyneside. It can be seen as a synthesis of traditional ABE group work and Open Learning.

There are difficulties involved in adopting this approach to maths work, hopefully the troubleshooters' guide will help pre-empt any problems. An open door policy in ABE maths provision should encourage students to participate fully throughout the learning process and become responsible for their own learning programmes. Perhaps the most important development is that students adopting such an approach are finding these methods of work transferable to their learning in general.

Trouble Shooting

(a) When giving new work explain it, giving relevant teaching points.

(b) Recap on a regular basis (ten minutes on four rules each session).

(c) Be familiar with the different methods of assessment.

(d) Encourage students to help each other if you are busy.

(e) Students should check and mark their own work, i.e. encourage and teach checking strategies.

(f) Encourage students to work at home if they wish.

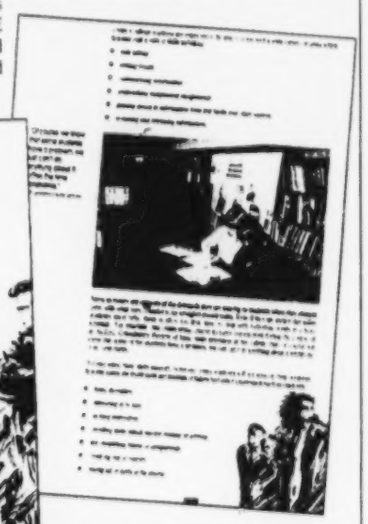
(g) Ensure a student can do the sub-skills before giving the main skill (being competent with division and multiplication will help when tackling fractions). ■

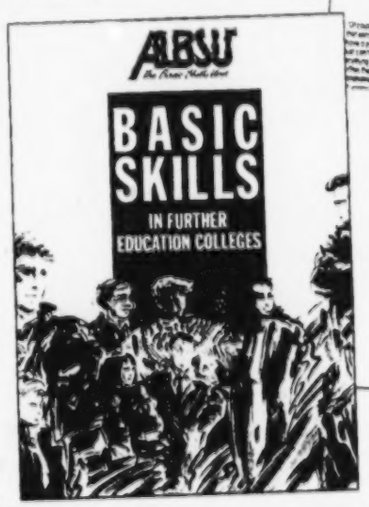
Information

HRH The Princess Royal, patron of ALBSU, meeting with Alan Wells, Director ALBSU, Edward Roberts, Chairman CENTEC and Member of ALBSU Board of Management, Timothy Eggar, Minister of State for Education and Science, and Peter Davis, Chairman, ALBSU. Her Royal Highness opened ALBSU's conference 'Basic Skills in Further Education Colleges' at which Mr Eggar said: "It is important that basic education for adults remains a sensitive, community based service."

Basic Skills in Further Education Colleges

Basic Skills in Further Education Colleges describes the need for basic skills provision in colleges of further education, and outlines how provision might be developed over the next few years. It draws on ALBSU's experience of consultancy work in FE colleges, and offers models of good practice in learning support and community based provision.





Individual copies are available free of charge from ALBSU.

ISBN: 1 870741 39 0

Viewpoints 12 Basic Skills in Further Education Colleges

The latest edition of Viewpoints contains contributions from managers and practitioners in further education colleges who are involved in the provision of basic skills. The five articles encompass recent developments in practice, and review the future development of basic skills in this sector of education.

ISBN 1 870741 42 0

Price: £1.85 plus 32p postage for one copy.

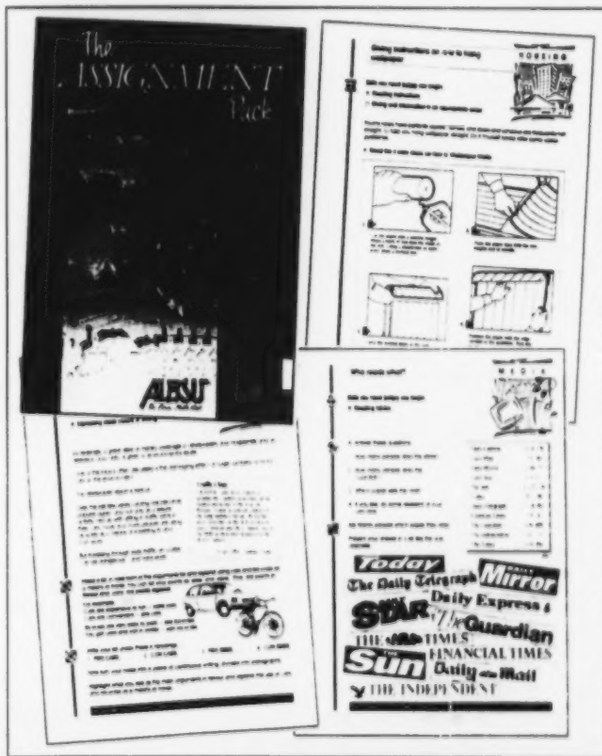
Ruth Gee becomes Vice-Chair of ALBSU

Ruth Gee has been appointed as the Vice-Chair of the Board of Management of the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit. The Vice-Chair, approved by the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales, is appointed by the Board.

Ruth Gee is Director of Edge Hill College of Higher Education in Lancashire and has considerable experience of education and local government. She was Deputy Leader of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) between 1983 and 1986.

The Chairman of ALBSU, Peter Davis, in welcoming Ruth Gee's appointment, said:

'I am very pleased that Ruth Gee, a distinguished educator, has agreed to become the Vice-Chair of ALBSU. I believe that her experience in local government and education and her interest in the needs of disadvantaged people will be of considerable benefit to ALBSU in a period of rapid change in education and training.'



Open Learning Assignment Pack

Are you thinking of introducing open or flexible learning? The Assignment Pack is a resource pack covering six areas – Health, Housing, Personal Finance, Travel, the Media and Job Seeking. It contains over a hundred assignments which can be used by people taking City and Guilds 3793 and 3794 (Wordpower and Numberpower) and is designed for use both at the place of delivery and by individuals following distance learning programmes.

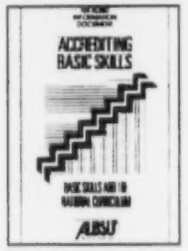
Each section has a detailed contents page which identifies the assignment under an activity heading, an individual title and indication of the relationship to the accreditation systems.

An answer section is provided for student self-checking where appropriate.

ISBN 1 870741 41 2

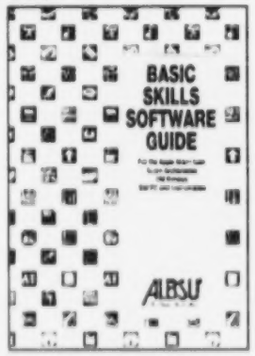
Price: £15.00

Wordpower, Numberpower and the National Curriculum



As part of the work to establish the links between Wordpower and Numberpower and other qualifications, ALBSU has mapped the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative standards across to the attainment targets in the English and Maths National Curriculum. Making connections between school and post school accreditation arrangements is essential to establish the value of qualifications obtained in later life in key areas such as basic skills. A digest of this mapping exercise, **Accrediting Basic Skills,** is now available from ALBSU as a free leaflet.

Basic Skills Software Guide

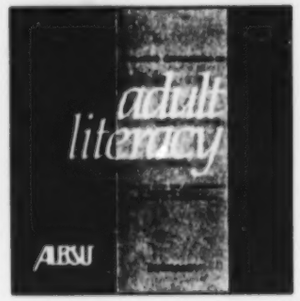


The guide provides up to date information about software available for basic skills, including ESOL. It will be of use to all staff who use computers in basic skills work. Details of new software are included for Apple Macintosh, Acorn Archimedes, IBM PC and compatibles and RM Nimbus computers. The guide has been produced for ALBSU by the Special Development Project at the Inner London Educational Computing Centre (ILECC).

ISBN 1 870741 35 8

Price: £6.50 plus 75p postage for one copy.

Effective Approaches in Adult Literacy



ALBSU is publishing a summary of the findings from this two year research project, highlighting some of the key qualities of effective provision.

ISBN 1 870741 36 6

Copies are available free from the Unit. The full report (£6.50 ISBN 1 870741 37 4) is also available from ALBSU.

Crediting Claimed Competence for Black/Ethnic Minority Adults with Overseas Qualifications

NIACE is currently embarking on the initial phase of a TEED-funded project, the aim of which is to establish the feasibility of accrediting black/ethnic minority adults who have overseas qualifications.

The importance of providing a quality guidance and accreditation service to all sections of the community is widely recognised. However, the involvement of those in the field is essential if we are to succeed in reshaping existing provision.

If your organisation is in touch with adults who have overseas qualifications or equivalent experience, you may be in a position to assist by supplying us with relevant information for our initial research.

Further information about this project, from either Toni Fazaeli on 0533 551310 or Stella Dadzie on 081-881 0435 during office hours.

LITERACY PROBLEMS AND EMPLOYMENT

In this article, John Atkinson, of the Institute of Manpower Studies, reports on research conducted for the Employment Service last year into the problems faced by people with literacy difficulties in getting a job . . . even an unskilled job which would require few or no literacy skills to perform it.

The rock and the hard place

Since the sixties, each successive recession has given rise to higher levels of unemployment and a more difficult problem of long term unemployment. Because unemployment is associated with a filtering down process (job seekers with skills, experience, age, health, etc., on their side, displacing those with fewer or no advantages) it comes as no surprise to note the relatively high level of basic skills problems among the unemployed in general, and long term unemployed in particular. In Britain today, about 13 per cent of the adult population suffer from some sort of reading or writing difficulty. Employment Department staff running Restart schemes for the long term unemployed estimate that fully a quarter of their clients had literacy problems. Despite generally poor data, the association between unemployment and basic skills problems is quite clear, with employment opportunities shrinking and the underlying rate of unemployment rising, those with basic skills problems appear to be very much caught between a rock and a hard place in the labour market. The rock is that fact that the number of relatively unskilled jobs, which they stand a chance of getting, has been falling for over twenty years. The hard place is that as unemployment rises people with better basic skills are forced down the labour market, displacing the less able in competition for vacancies.

While the brutal realities of their situation are quite simple when viewed from a distance, they are much more complex when viewed close up. If we ask, why is it that people with literacy problems find it difficult to get jobs, we can come up with three possible explanations

1. if they have reading difficulties they may not find out about vacancies which are advertised in the press or the Jobcentre;
2. recruiters may discriminate against them, even though the job content does not require literacy skills; and
3. jobs which are ostensibly unskilled, do nevertheless require literacy abilities on the part of the job holder.

In order to find how far each of these possible explanations contributed to the plight of unemployed people with literacy problems, we surveyed 1800 employers, focusing on their recruitment and selection procedures for relatively unskilled vacancies, and we followed the survey up by detailed interviews with about 30 of them.

Hypothesis 1: Can't Read the Advertisement

This was the least compelling explanation. In general we found that employers used multiple methods of advertising their vacancies, most often a formal one (say press advertising) which required reading skills on the part of the job seeker, backed up by an informal one (like word of mouth) which did not. A third of our respondents used *only* methods which would probably require some reading ability on the part of the job seeker (press advertising and/or Jobcentre), and only eight per cent of them announced vacancies exclusively through the press. However, for the remaining two thirds, the widespread preference for supplementing formal with informal methods (word of mouth, casual callers, etc.), suggests that the existence of vacancies to most of these jobs could be discovered fairly easily by non-readers.

Furthermore, the cooler the labour market the more likely were our respondents to use informal methods that did not require reading skills from the job seeker. Our southern-based recruiters used more formal methods, particularly press advertising. In the north, recruiters made more use of informal methods, used them alone more frequently, and where they did use formal methods, used the jobcentre more than press advertising.

We concluded that if non-reading job seekers cannot get jobs, it is unlikely to be because they cannot find out about them on account of their difficulty.

Hypothesis 2: Discrimination by Recruiters

It is important here to distinguish between the indirect discrimination suffered by jobseekers with literacy problems through a selection process which assumes that people can read and write, and which makes no allowances for difficulties

and overt, direct discrimination, intended deliberately to filter them out. We found a lot of evidence of the first, and contradictory evidence about the second.

Looking first at indirect discrimination, we found that the widespread use of the application form in the shortlisting and selection process significantly disadvantages the job seeker with literacy problems before he/she can get to interview, or to do a test or a job trial to reveal their strengths. Application forms were *always* used for *all* vacancies by 70 per cent of our employers, and sometimes by a further 10 per cent. But they were overwhelmingly used for perfectly sound reasons, rather than explicitly to identify literacy shortcomings. The application form combines (1) operational convenience (by drawing all the relevant basic information together, providing the basis for shortlisting, providing the foundations for a subsequent employee record and sometimes providing part of the subsequent employment contract), with (2) organisational coherence (listing the main areas of concern for selection, prompting systematic inquiry into them at interview, and aiding equity and fair comparison in selection).

Nevertheless, application forms did provide the main way in which recruiters assessed applicants' literacy abilities, as Table 1 shows. It was very rare for recruiters to solicit explicit evidence of literacy skills through testing, even indirectly through a job-related test of some kind. Even where the job in question explicitly required literacy skills four out of five recruiters still relied on inference.

Table 1: 'How do you establish the literacy of an applicant?'

	%	N=
By inference from the application form	83.5	729
By inference from the educational record	62.5	546
By inference from the job record	45.9	401
By the results from a written job-related test	5.6	49
By conducting a specific test for literacy skills	1.8	16

We also found that nearly two thirds of our respondents were prepared to offset literacy shortcomings among applicants against other characteristics or strengths. Most often this involved information which would be derived from the application form (good work record, relevant experience) but in many cases, such information could only be derived at the interview stage (personal characteristics, keenness, good verbal communication skills, appearance, willingness to learn, etc.).

So far as explicit and direct discrimination is concerned, we certainly found that recruiters would use evidence of literacy problems (most usually, a badly completed application form) to imply rather broader shortcomings on the part of the applicant, as Table 2 shows. Fully three quarters of our respondents might be led to infer a *general* learning difficulty from evidence of a *specific* failure to learn (or indeed to be taught).

Table 2: 'Would a low standard of reading or writing suggest anything else to you about a candidate's suitability for employment?'

Candidate may	% Yes	N=
have learning difficulties	78.9	664
be of low intelligence	56.4	475
lack perseverance	20.0	168
not be keen on the job	8.8	74
other (mainly limited/ insufficient education)	6.4	54

However, despite this tendency to read more into literacy problems than the simple fact that the recruit might have some problems reading or writing, nearly 40 per cent of our employers claimed that they would be prepared to recruit a candidate with known reading problems (for writing the figure rises to nearly half). This suggests that among employers there is no intention to discriminate directly against people with literacy problems. Nor can we dismiss this as so much hot air; their future intentions were invariably lower than their past experience of having made such a recruitment, so they were on the whole more cautious about the future than their past record might suggest.

In order to calculate the likelihood of a person with a literacy problem being recruited (all other things being equal) we conditioned our employers' claims about their future readiness to do so by their past experience of so doing (i.e. if they said they might in the future, but hadn't in the past, we gave them a lower score). The (very conservative) estimates which emerged are shown in Chart 1, for reading. The results for writing are similar, but much more favourable to the applicant.

We can see that (all other things being equal) jobseekers with a reading problem would probably be able to get at least 45 per cent, and possibly half, of these jobs. They would certainly be ruled out of a quarter of them, and probably not get the remaining quarter.

It is also very clear that there are major differences between jobs with such applicants ruled out of about a third of driving and selling jobs, and 29 per cent of warehouse jobs. This inter-job variation is important because it matches very closely employers' estimates of how important literacy skills are in the job in question, and this raises our third hypothesis, that relatively unskilled jobs do have literacy requirements, which may not be immediately obvious to the applicant.

Hypothesis 3: It's the Job Content that Counts

One of the most frustrating things reported by unemployed job seekers with literacy problems is their certainty that they are able to do a certain job (sometimes because

Chart 1: 'Would you knowingly recruit somebody with READING difficulties?' (N.B. stated intention moderated by past record).

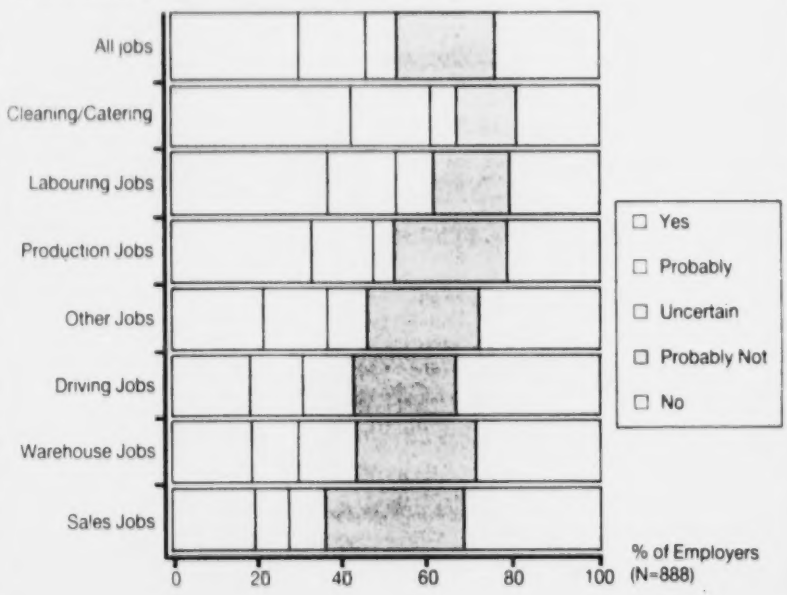
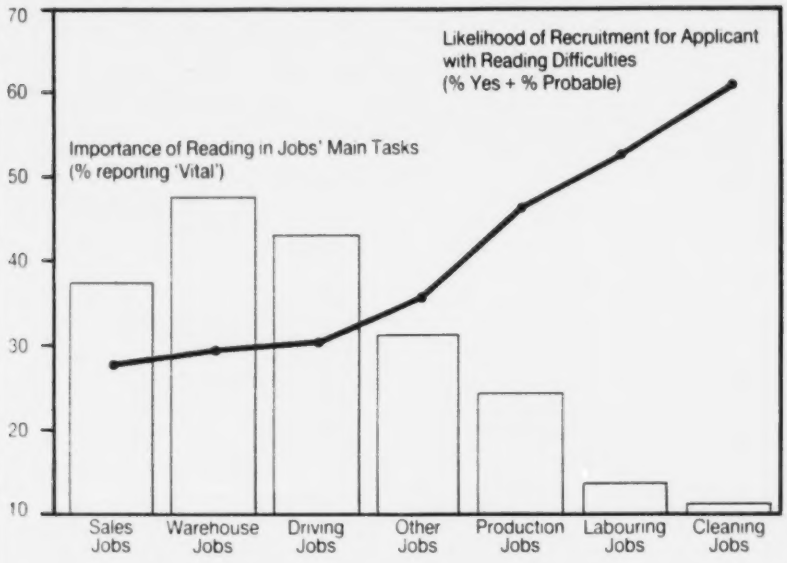


Chart 2: 'How important are reading skills to perform the job's main tasks?'



they have done it before) which they now cannot get, perhaps on account of their difficulty. We tried to evaluate exactly how important reading and writing were for different jobs, so far as employers were concerned, and we looked at several sources of this need. Here, we will just be concerned with reading ability, and only so far as it is required by the job's main tasks. Chart 2 shows the proportion of employers who regarded reading as vital in this respect for a range of jobs. We can see that the importance of reading varies from an index of ten for cleaning and catering jobs to 48 for warehouse jobs.

Overlying the block figure, the line graph shows how likely it is that an applicant with reading difficulties would be taken on. It is evident that employer willingness to hire is strongly related to their perceptions about how far the job entails such skills.

While variation in job requirements is therefore a necessary explanation of employers' selection preferences, it is far from sufficient. For example, we can see from Chart 2 that nine out of ten recruiters to cleaning/catering jobs do not regard reading skills at vital, yet four in ten would still be unlikely to hire somebody who could not read into such a job.

To explain this we need to look slightly wider than the job's main tasks. We found that health and safety considerations and the need to understand and comply with workplace procedures were extremely important sources of demand for reading skills at work, and furthermore, such considerations did not vary so much between jobs. As a result, employers might see little need for reading skills in performing a cleaner's job, but still require them from recruits for workplace-related reasons. These factors go some way to explain the gap between the job seeker's 'certainty' that they can do the job, and the employer's preference for somebody who can read.

Finally, the emphasis placed by employers on literacy skills has always been slowly rising, irrespective of the job or workplace in question. We asked our respondents how far their requirements for literacy skills had been changing, and Table 3 shows their responses. It is evident that, while we are not dealing here with a whirlwind of change, and while change is much less marked for writing skills than for reading, nevertheless the trend is firmly towards an increasing level of literacy requirement, even within that shrinking constituency of relatively unskilled jobs. Interestingly, there is absolutely no evidence here to support a hypothesis of de-skilling.

Table 3: 'Has the importance of literacy changed in the last five years?'

	Reading %	Writing %
More important	49.1	32.7
No change	50.4	66.2
Less important	0.5	1.1

So What?

We have shown that the problems of the unemployed job seeker with reading or writing problems derive from a quite complex mix of factors. He/she is not much disadvantaged by ignorance about vacancies. He/she is indirectly discriminated against by the conventions used by employers to select and shortlist candidates for interview, but these conventions are so firmly rooted and so useful to employers that they are unlikely ever to change much. He/she probably suffers from some direct discrimination on account of prejudice about his/her disability, but this is probably quite small beer compared with the valid discrimination exercised by employers in selecting recruits with the characteristics the job and the workplace require of them.

In addition, in making these judgements, employers rely almost wholly on rule of thumb, both to assess the candidate's skills and in deciding on the level of literacy skill actually needed. So it is hardly surprising that when the labour market turns in the employers' favour, they play safe by selecting candidates with better literacy skills than the minimum they might get away with at a pinch.

Lessons

What lessons can we learn about advising job seekers with such problems who are caught in this trap? Firstly, the importance of completing application forms accurately and presentably cannot be over-stressed. Get help! Secondly, because there is such wide variation in the level of literacy needed between ostensibly similar jobs, counselling about the appropriateness of vacancies could reduce wasted effort in chasing the sort of jobs, or the sort of employer, where such an applicant stands little chance. Get wise! Thirdly, because employers place quite a lot of emphasis on past job record and experience, particularly if these can be backed up by references, such strengths should be given prominence in letters of application and in interview. Get smart!

These are paltry enough of course. The logic of the labour market will always work against such job seekers when they have to compete with less disadvantaged people filtering down the market as it tightens. In the longer term, it is only through actually mastering these basic skills that such people can expect to prosper in work. There are no convincing short cuts to improve their chances markedly and permanently. Our results clearly show how little training in basic skills they can expect to receive from employers (fully half give no help at all, and of those who do, nine in ten restrict that help to informal on-the-job mentoring). Here is a clear case for further public intervention. Without sustained remedial re-training in basic skills, the best efforts of individuals are unlikely to be very successful, and they will languish at the bottom of the labour market, permanently exposed to unemployment. Nor, without adequate basic skill provision, is there a sound foundation for developing the technical and job-related skills which an advanced and successful economy requires. ■

The research outlined here is reported in full in 'Literacy and Less Skilled Jobs', John Atkinson and Rachel Papworth, IMS Report No. 211, Institute of Manpower Studies, University of Sussex, 1991. Thanks are due to the Employment Service for their permission to use the results here. The views expressed in the article are those of the author alone.

ESOL, Wordpower & Accreditation

Sally Crofts, basic skills support tutor, vocational training, reports on research at Handsworth College, funded by Birmingham Economic Development Department, on Wordpower, accreditation and Employment Training.

As the project worker, I consulted both ESOL and vocational tutors, and the mainly Vietnamese and South Asian students who were attempting wordpower assessments on language courses supporting their vocational programmes: the specific areas of Motor Vehicle, Hairdressing and Clothing Manufacture training were considered.

Wordpower was designed to develop standards for using communication skills. For the purpose of accreditation these can be assessed continuously in practical, authentic situations. As a basic skills initiative, language acquisition was not its design focus; it is one option for ESOL. Wordpower's merits were considered against other systems of accreditation designed specifically for ESOL, in particular the RSA Profile Certificate, comparable because it is also competence-based.

Wordpower and vocational courses The flexibility of Wordpower was an advantage on Employment Training courses, where it fitted individual vocational interests and roll on roll off provision with varying amounts of language support. The communication skills assessed by Wordpower were appropriate to those needed by ESOL students on vocational courses – both the formal language requirements like reading instructions, talking to clients, writing a memo, and also general language skills needed by students to participate in courses outside the safety of the ESOL classroom, such as asking for information and clarification, listening to instructions and lectures.

Using Wordpower with such courses helped establish space and structures for communication skills to be acknowledged and developed. Whilst ensuring that these skills were not overlooked on the vocational course, it also helped ESOL tutors to place teaching in a context most appropriate to student needs. This favoured a task-based approach – working towards real telephone and letter enquiries, for example, giving talks to visitors about training, following tables and instructions for vocational tasks.

Comparison with the RSA Profile Certificate helped to explore some of the reservations ESOL practitioners had about using Wordpower.

(i) **Oral/aural skills:** From an ESOL perspective, Wordpower takes much about listening and speaking skills for granted. Oral communication assessment is standardised by 'performance criteria' as much about using suitable body language and facial expression as with using appropriate language. There is no credit for the many small steps of oral/aural language development that ESOL students must take.

In comparison, the RSA Profile Certificate in ESOL offers Profile competences equally weighted in the four language skill areas – reading, writing, listening and speaking. These can be built up by students in the areas most relevant to them, final Certification simply records those competences gained.

However, the RSA Profile Certificate is intended to run alongside an entire ESOL course, incorporating a record keeping structure to reflect the gradual development and accumulation of language skills. Wordpower is an assessment of performance and proof of communicative competence in authentic situations irrespective of a student's first language. It is not designed to replace a language syllabus, and its use for ESOL accreditation should not preclude space and time on a language course for the development of language skills.

(ii) **Level:** Wordpower is aimed at all-round communicative competence at four levels, posing some difficulties for ESOL where literacy and oracy skills vary considerably. Many Vietnamese students, for example, found such tasks as using a dictionary or reading a table of information – skills transferrable from their first language – far simpler than oral communication tasks like making a brief phone call. The reverse was true for some of the older Asian students, for whom literacy skills were more difficult: this suggests that Wordpower is better suited to such students in respect of the levels it accredits.

(iii) **Status:** Some tutors were unsure of the value of a Basic Skills qualification, especially where students had a high level of communication skills in their first languages. It was felt very important to acknowledge the skills all students had in areas outside of English language use. The decision of Birmingham TEC to include Wordpower as a 'positive outcome' on its Initial Training courses has helped to give it a higher profile and status. Surely all Certification is useful, and Wordpower does prove that students can cope with the communication demands of employment.

Decisions about accreditation should be based on student need and preference – and depend much on initial assessment procedures. What communication skills do students have already and what skills do they need to develop for themselves and for their vocational/academic goals? Involving students in this decision is fundamental and yet very difficult where the idea of assessment and accreditation is so hard to convey. As part of the Accreditation Project, we produced translations of Wordpower information and charts demonstrating the linking of Wordpower to various vocational courses.

Ideally, other accreditation options should be available, and the greater the flexibility an institution can offer the better – but this has considerable resource implications. The integration of Wordpower into the vocational curriculum requires a significant time commitment for liaison, administration and co-ordination, as would the making available of different assessment schemes.

To summarise the relative merits of the competence-based Certificates, Wordpower suits a task-based ESOL course, possibly linked to vocational courses, can be pursued by individuals within a group, and allows for individual interests and time-scales. It demonstrates competence in the practical use of language. The RSA Profile also adapts well to individual needs, its use is best suited to one ESOL class meeting regularly, agreeing on broadly similar 'topic' areas of interest, and concentrating on the build up of language skills.

Any alternatives involve examinations – favouring the regular ESOL class structure – with less adaptability towards individual needs and interests. However, an examination system might be more familiar and acceptable to some ESOL students, and is probably easier to administrate. Pitman's ESOL exams operate at five levels, with tasks reflecting teaching methods and using 'authentic, creative' materials; there is no oral examination. The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry offers a Spoken English examination at four levels, the higher levels geared towards Business English. The Cambridge Syndicate First Certificate and Proficiency examinations are at intermediate and advanced levels, more EFL/based and formal, and might suit ESOL students going on to more professional or academic courses. ■

Partners in Literacy

by Linda Pearce, Video by LDA

Produced by Learning Development Aids, Duke Street, Wisbech, Cambs PE13 2AE.

Price: £42.95 + VAT

ISBN 1855 030 470

Partners in Literacy comes as a complete package comprising a 70 minute video and a comprehensive teacher's handbook containing a set of useful photocopiable booklets. It aims to encourage the active involvement of parents in their children's experience of spoken and written language.

The video is divided into eight modules, ranging from 'Reading is Understanding' to 'Helping Children to Spell'. It sets itself out to be 'Everything you need to make your parental involvement successful for your school, your pupils and their parents'. The material was reviewed by parents, teachers and workers involved in the Parent Education Projects which form part of Family Education in Devon and we used the materials with groups in four primary schools across Devon to see whether it achieved these aims. In brief, the video received mixed reviews:

'It provided a good visual demonstration of how to use each task/ module discussed in the teacher's handbook.'

'The images on the video would put off many of the parents who need most help in supporting their children's learning'.

'The video made us intensely uncomfortable'.

'The video was friendly, encouraging and showed enjoyment of reading.'

Concerns about the video centred around the images of parents and children who appeared to come from middle class backgrounds and had an unrealistic degree of patience and understanding. In module 3, concerned with 'Word Games' the parent on several occasions deliberately mis-spells words in order to let her daughter win the game. This may give the child a positive experience but all the parents who watched this module felt it was unrealistic and would not work with their own children. We all like the use of games for learning but would suggest co-operative rather than competitive games.

Despite the introduction explaining the reasons for the total lack of ethnic minority groups in the video, it is a serious omission. Explanations are no excuse and do not help. However, a conscious effort was made to ensure an equal gender balance.

In a more general context, the video provided a medium which generated much discussion around issues of parents and parental involvement in schools.

The handbook received very positive reviews from both parents and teachers who found it excellent, encouraging and user friendly. It has good page layout and graphics and is full of simple and practical ideas on encouraging the development of literacy in children which should get a good response from parents.

The handbook has four sections: Part 1 concerns itself with the principles of partnership and an understanding of the reading process. This section outlines the acquisition of reading skills and the problems children may experience. Part 2, is a guide to the content and use of the 8 modules featured in the video. A detailed explanation is given of positive actions that parents can take in the home to acquire the skills necessary to enjoy and succeed in all aspects of written and spoken communication. It empowers parents by sharing the processes that teachers use within the school environment. Part 3 provides a clear and concise checklist for parents and teachers to use when setting up a home/school project to encourage the development of literacy. Part 4 contains a series of photocopy masters and guildelines on home-reading procedure. This section was particularly well received by all those who used the material.

After practical use, all the projects wished to recommend 'Partners in Literacy' as an excellent information and resource pack for anyone wishing to promote partnerships between parents and school and especially supporting parents in their role as the natural educators of their children. However, caution does need to be taken when using the video as it would be inappropriate in many settings.

Nigel Hillier and the Parent Education Projects,
Devon Education Authority

Questique

Devised by David English

Published by Questique International, 37 Queensway, Lincoln LN2 4AT.

Price: £19.85 incl. p&p

No ISBN

This is a board game which describes itself as a strategy crossword game, suitable for 2 to 4 players from age 8 to adult. It has a set of plastic letter tiles, using upper case letters, and a board laid out in squares with four starting positions with stars arranged around them. Players develop their own crosswords and the objective is to cover the stars and to stop others from doing so. The first player to cover any four stars is the winner. It's played with seven letters at a time, in much the same way as scrabble, with the main differences being that each player forms an individual grid and there is no numerical scoring system. There are some additional ideas for more difficult play and a handicapping system.

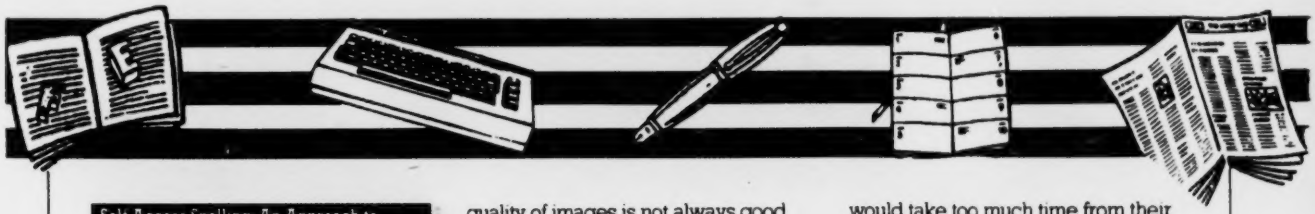
The whole game is of good quality, with attractive presentation and looks as if it would be quite durable. The letter tiles can be used independently to play other word games.

I tried out Questique with students and tutors in two basic skills groups and with a literacy/leisure group run by the Probation Service. The groups had all used other word games as a way of reinforcing learning or just for enjoyment.

One advantage the game has when played with more basic learners is that the individual grid allows the players to plan moves in advance and not feel threatened by other players. It allows players to build up complex words gradually and to see how the words relate to each other. However, students who had already played Scrabble missed the scoring element to the game. I personally enjoyed the strategy of trying to prevent other players from covering the stars nearest to their cards, but this seemed to be a minority view.

To sum up, I will use this game in my groups because it is quite enjoyable and a useful additional resource, but I can't say that it is something I would want to rush out and buy, particularly as I already have other word games.

Chris Wakley
ABE tutor/Open Learning Organiser
Gwent Education Authority



Self Access Spelling: An Approach to Structured Spelling

by Jan Hulley

Produced by National Extension College, 18 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge CB2 2HN

Price: £29.95 inc. p&p

ISBN 1 853 561 517

Self Access Spelling is designed to help mature learners to improve spelling using a systematic approach which builds on each stage of prior learning. The author supports the multi-sensory approach used by the Dyslexia Institute and students are encouraged to use auditory, oral and kinaesthetic methods and to develop visual memory.

The guide is in two parts – Part 1 for the 'non reader, non-speller' and Part 2 for students who are able to read but who experience difficulty with written language skills. The programme structure comprises a series of stages ranging from letter recognition through phonemes, digraphs, syllables, etc., to prefixes and suffixes. These technical terms are used to label the students' worksheets and although this method may meet the author's objective of providing students with a language to talk about spelling, such jargon can prove daunting to the uninitiated.

The structure is cumulative and students are required to gain a thorough knowledge at each stage before progression. This guide should therefore be used as a programmed approach to learning and not as a resource to dip into.

The guide overcomes the disadvantages of rote learning by relating the spelling structures to the use of newspapers. This provides a meaningful context for some students but news rapidly becomes history and it would be necessary to update worksheets and adapt them to local current issues to maintain interest.

The worksheets are presented in the format of the original Self-Access series: A4 worksheets with accompanying answer sheets. The materials are copyright-free for educational purposes and the guide would therefore be a valuable resource in open learning workshops and in situations where students are encouraged to work independently. As some of the original material was gathered from newspapers, the quality of images is not always good enough for reproduction.

With adaptation, Self-Access Spelling would be a useful resource for developing spelling.

Sue Buss,
Manager, Core Skills Project,
Devon Education Authority

Developing Learning Skills

by Sam McKeown

Published by National Extension College, 18 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge CB2 2HN

Price: £29.95

ISBN 1 853 561 398

In his introduction to this manual, Sam McKeown states that his intention is for it to be used by subject tutors of students in the 16-19 age group so that study skills can be an integral part of the course.

There are notes for the tutor, which include aims, time, outcomes, organisation and follow-up suggestions and activity sheets that may be photocopied for the students.

The exercises highlight study techniques and encourage groups of students to explore their strengths and weaknesses in these areas. They are not intended to give students intensive practice in their weak areas.

The project/assignment section contains 9 individual exercises and shows the Key Stages of the National Curriculum which are covered by each exercise. A Learning Skills Profile is included, the intention being to check off competencies the students have achieved.

The instructions and details of the activities are clear and well presented. It would not be possible for students with basic reading or writing skills to complete the majority of the tasks, but it would certainly be of benefit to a range of more able students needing to improve their study skills. The activities allow for the tutor or students to incorporate their own material into the exercises. This would certainly be a valuable resource to tutors supporting students who need to improve their study skills for various reasons, including Access, Return to Learn, A level and GCSE and post-literacy students in groups or as independent learners. However, subject tutors at this college felt that it would take too much time from their own subject syllabus, but agreed that the manual would be useful for their own students.

Pam Stewart,
Dudley Metropolitan Borough

The Number Shop Game

Produced by 'The Number Shop', 67 Bread Street, Edinburgh EH3 9AH.

Price: £4.95

No ISBN

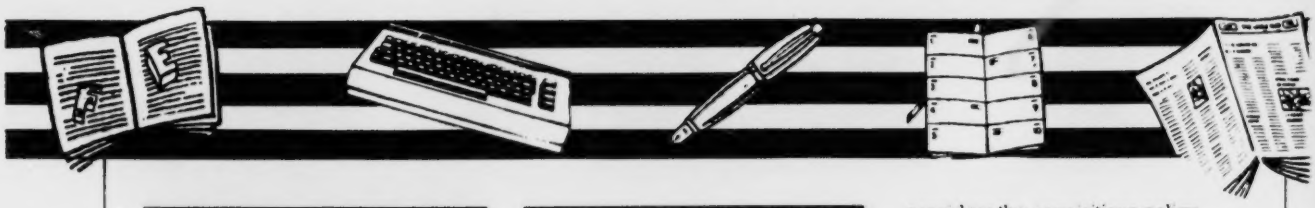
The pack consists of 32 cards in playing card format and is accompanied by a list of suggestions for its use. Each card contains a picture of a common household or grocery item together with its price. Although the pictures appear to be artistic representations rather than photographs, the use of common brand names brings a certain degree of realism to the images portrayed.

The main skills that could be exercised by using the cards are those of number and coin familiarisation, estimation, addition and subtraction. You could, for example, ask a student to work out the change she would get if she bought an item with a £1 coin or a £5 note, and, depending on her level of numerical awareness, count out the amount of coins. A considerable merit is that it helps students to visualise real-life situations in a way that many paper-based activities cannot do.

Tutors using the packs should find that students enjoy using the cards but they will probably find they have to be fairly careful with which students they would use them; in a mixed group they may only be appropriate to the needs of a few students. Their usefulness with special needs students is obvious and in fact some of the accompanying suggestions are probably most useful with such students.

A final attribute of the pack is that some of the activities can be set up as simulations to support those Foundation Level, City and Guilds 3794 Numberpower competencies related to using money.

Jessica Brittan
Open Learning Project Co-ordinator
London Borough of Haringey



Literacy, Communication and Libraries: a study guide

by Kevin McGarry

Published by Library Association Publishing Ltd, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE

Price: £26.50

ISBN 0 85365 868 4

When I saw the title of this book I was excited. Here, I hoped, was a challenging analysis of the relationship between the three activities identified in the title – literacy, communication, libraries. Such an analysis would, in my opinion, be very timely in view of the current fears about the situation of mass literacy and the criticism of the failure of librarians to take an interest in helping people to develop and practice the art of reading in recent years.

However, the book is what it describes itself – a study guide. And, as such, it contains a great deal of factual information about the history of communications, the development of writing and printing, different definitions of litaracy and practical aspects of how and why people read. Unfortunately it does not attempt any analysis.

What I shall personally find valuable are the extensive bibliographies at the end of each chapter. There are also substantial appendices listing further sources of information both written and in the form of details of research and professional organisations and index and abstracting services covering the field.

This is not really a book for the general reader, but it is a book for anyone who wants a starting point for a more in depth study of literacy. The price at £26.50 for less than 200 pages appears expensive, even by today's standards, but properly reflects the amount of research which has gone into producing the book.

Patricia M. Coleman
Director of Library Services
Birmingham City Council

Adult Literacy, Basic Skills and Libraries

by Gerald Bramley

Published by Library Association Publishing Ltd, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE

Price: £29.50

ISBN 0 8517 443 2

The book is intended for librarians looking to develop or improve services to the educationally disadvantaged, for schools of librarianship as project material and for basic education workers demonstrating what role libraries can play in ABE provision. It aims to help develop closer links between adult education providers and library services.

The whole field of adult literacy provision is explored, including not only services and materials to ABE students (part 1), but other special groups: bilingual and black communities (part 2); the physically handicapped (part 3); the retired and unemployed (part 4). The author examines the educational requirements of each, followed by a consideration of services and materials libraries might introduce to meet these needs.

Many of the sections do not cover new ground. Where they do, however, is in the detailed background information. As a librarian currently looking at adult literacy and libraries, I found part 1 to be particularly interesting. Setting the style for the rest of the book, it begins by considering in detail the complete background to ABE, including the personal, economic and educational circumstances that lead people to join adult literacy classes. It then goes on to provide a 'blueprint' for libraries regarding ABE provision: who should conduct the review of the service; funding; who will be served; who should do the teaching. It also considers the acquisitions policy, materials evaluation and selection of ABE materials.

The sections thereafter also prove to be very informative and useful, whether setting up a service from scratch or planning to improve the existing one.

In conclusion, although lengthy in parts, it is well worth reading and could indeed prove to be a useful resource for librarians and non-librarians alike.

Karen Atkins
Community Librarian
Salford Arts and Leisure Department

Short Notice

Letters in the Sun: a study of literacy in rural development

Produced by Education for Development, Woodmans, 5-7 Westwood Row, Tilehurst, Reading RG3 6LT

Price: £15.00

No ISBN

This is a video which examines the questions relating to adult literacy programmes in the context of rural development. Although filmed in Bangladesh, it is concerned with the general issues raised, using Bangladesh as a case study. The video does not promote any one viewpoint; it seeks to raise questions, not to answer them. A set of accompanying notes is available.

Also received

Adult Literacy: Master or Servant?

by James Jennings

Published by University Press

Available from James Jennings, 150 Coppice Street, Oldham OL8 4B

Price: £7.00 plus £1.25 p&p

No ISBN

The ALBSU Newsletter is published four times a year, in November, February, May and July. Copies are available, free, to organisations and individuals. We aim to publish articles of interest to those teaching in adult literacy, second language and basic skills, those who are responsible for funding and organising the provision, and those who are generally interested in these important areas of work.

If you have ideas on topics which you would like to see covered, please contact the Editor, at ALBSU. Reviews of relevant publications are written for the newsletter by practitioners, and we are interested to receive publications which could be useful in basic education.

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, Kingsbourne House, 229/231 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA. Tel: 071-405 4017.

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ALBSU
The Basic Skills Unit

Organising Resources in OPEN LEARNING

It is not easy to organise materials so that students can pick the section of a book, tape, worksheet or computer programme which suits them, knowing its level and purpose. Alison Thompson, Co-ordinator, Open Learning Centre, Newcastle, describes the system they have set up.

Open and different

For many people the term Open Learning conjures up images of learning packs which enable access to training without the need for attendance at a fixed time or place and where tuition is delivered entirely through the pack, with or without tutorial support by post or phone, or face to face.

There is, however, a sense in which the Open Learning Pack is in fact the most closed method of learning – the pack itself defines what should be learnt, the time it should take and the methodology employed. Little allowance is made for prior learning, preferred modes of learning, or individual difficulties. Failure to achieve the stated aims of the pack inevitably implies inadequacy on the part of the student; there is also the assumption that unless every part of the pack is completed, thorough learning has not taken place, regardless of whether the individual student actually needed to cover all the ground.

Most ABE tutors would reject the notion of students fitting themselves to available resources, and insist that the resources should be capable of being adapted to fit student needs. For this reason, amongst others, within the context of ABE, the term Open Learning has developed in a substantially different way. Here the emphasis has been on flexibility, variety, 'openness' in the sense of provision geared to meet the wide range of needs presented by a wide variety of students, and the implications of this for the development and organisation of resources have been of crucial significance for those of us involved in working in the Open Learning Centres.

The 'openness' of the new Centres has meant that any student wishing to work on any aspect of English or Maths up to GCSE level has been able to benefit from provision offered, on an entirely individual basis, working at a pace and level which suits that student, on topics relevant to particular needs.

In our experience it is rare for any two students to follow identical work plans – individual preferences concerning modes of learning, pace of learning, topics covered, etc., mean that there are as many different ways of achieving similar goals as there are students.

For example, there may be, say, half a dozen students at any given time in the year working on fractions, for a variety of reasons and therefore with a variety of goals beyond that of simply wanting to understand fractions. The individual goal, as well as the level of knowledge already possessed, determines the way in which this might be approached, as do factors such as time available, possible examination or test requirements, the student's own learning patterns and, importantly, the student's feelings about the topic. Thus there will be six different work plans, using resources in six different ways, and an analysis will show that whilst there may be resources common to all, it is the particular combination of resources which promotes effective individual learning.

It is evident then, that to offer truly flexible provision geared to individual needs we must ensure as much variety in our resources as possible.

Fortunately, generous funding of the Open Learning Centres meant that we were able to acquire just such a rich variety, including not only traditional paper-based learning materials, supplemented by resources produced by the Project Team, together with a varied collection of 'Everyday Materials'.

So . . . we had an impressively wide range of resources which are being added to all the time.

It was always evident that simply having them was not enough – we had to make them accessible to both tutors and students so that the encouragement of independent learning (one of the major aims of the Open Learning Centres) would be possible. In other words, we had to provide enough information about the resources for students to make realistic choices about the kinds of resources that would meet their needs, would suit their approach to learning and would reflect the level they wanted to work at.

Setting up a system

Initially we used colour coding, but found it was not enough to know that such and such a book contained a chapter on letter-writing, or that a computer programme would help with spelling – we need much more information in terms of levels, possible routes through resources, different methods of approach.

We needed a system which would enable initially tutors and students, then students alone, to make rational, informed decisions about which resources they wanted to use.

We decided that what we needed was a system which would:

- enable everybody to find quickly exactly what they wanted
- be easy to understand
- offer a realistic choice of resources

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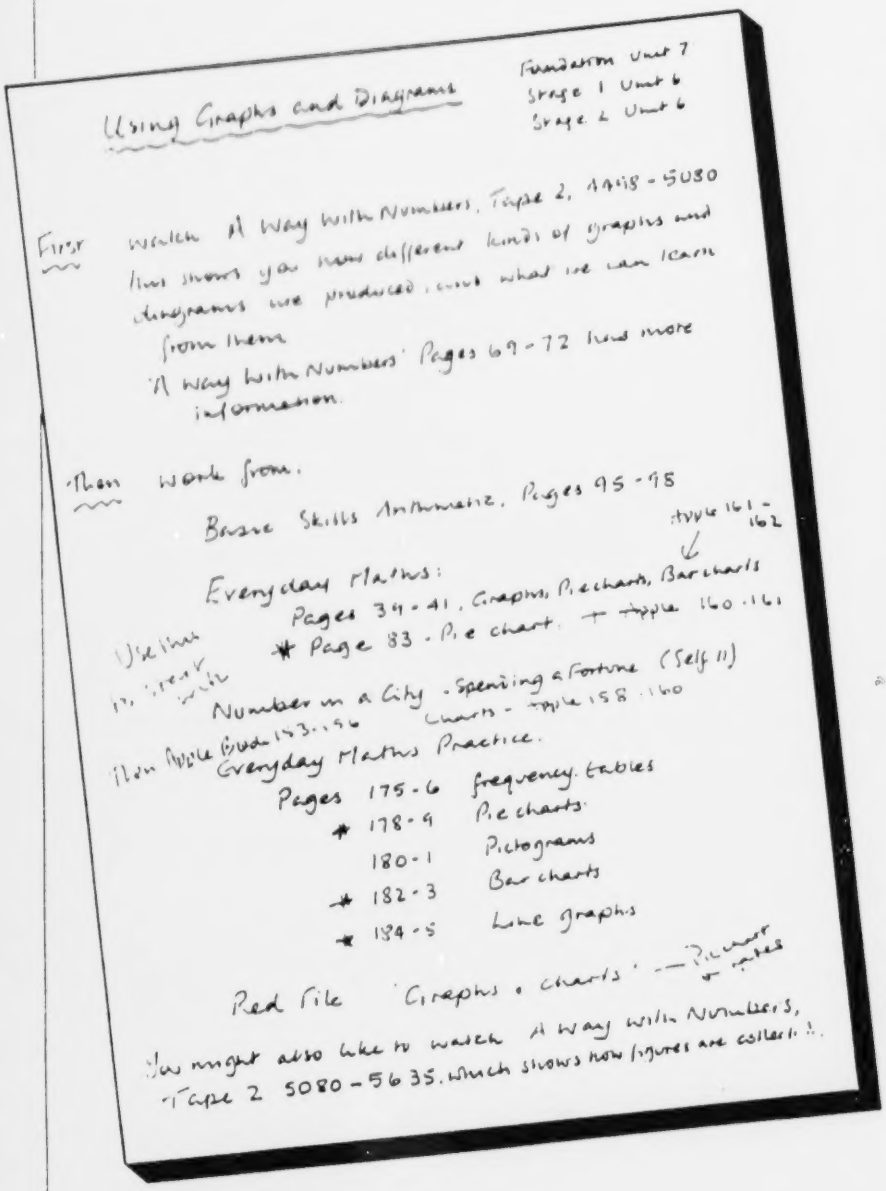


Using Graphs and Diagrams

Foundation Unit 7
Stage 1 Unit 6
Stage 2 Unit 6

First watch A Way with Numbers, Tape 2, 4418 - 5080
This shows you how different kinds of graphs and
diagrams are produced, and what we can learn
from them
'A Way with Numbers' Pages 69 - 72 have more
information.

Then work from:

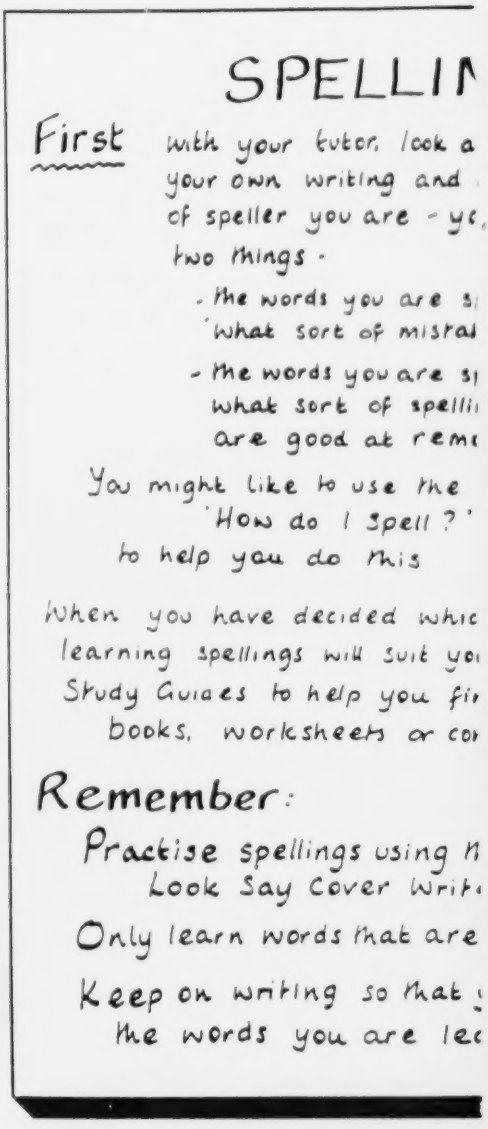
Basic Skills Arithmetic, Pages 95 - 98

Everyday Maths:
Pages 34 - 41, Graphs, Piecharts, Barcharts
* Page 83 - Pie chart.

Number on a City - Spending a Fortune (Self 11)
Everyday Maths Practice.
Pages 175 - 6 frequency tables
* 178 - 9 Pie charts
180 - 1 Pictograms
* 182 - 3 Bar charts
* 184 - 5 Line graphs

Red File 'Graphs + charts'

You might also like to watch A Way with Numbers,
Tape 2 5080 - 5635. which shows how figures are collected.



SPELLIN

First with your tutor, look a
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two things -

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what sort of mistal
- the words you are s
what sort of spelli
are good at rem

You might like to use the
'How do I spell?'
to help you do this

When you have decided whic
learning spellings will suit yo
Study Guides to help you fi
books, worksheets or co

Remember:

Practise spellings using M
Look Say Cover Writ

Only learn words that are

Keep on writing so that
the words you are le

- co-ordinate all the different kinds of resources, making a multimedia approach possible where appropriate
- be capable of answering questions like 'Where do I start?' 'Where do I go from here?' 'I need more on this, what else might help?'
- give an indication of levels of operation
- indicate probable outcomes
- be linked to accreditation levels
- be capable of being added to or amended by everybody
- invite comments from users
- suggest rather than stipulate.

Study Guides

Once we had defined our needs, the development of the Study Guides seemed an obvious and logical solution.

We started with Numeracy materials, since this seemed to be the major area where we were using a very limited selection of the resources available, and were aware that potentially valuable materials were either not being used, or were being used haphazardly, thus depleting their effectiveness. There was confusion about coherent routes through the wealth of materials available, resulting in many of us sticking to a few tried and tested books or packs, with the occasional foray into the SMILE programmes.

The operation itself involved the thorough analysis and cataloguing of all the Numeracy materials we possessed. Using broad topics, lists were made of everything we had on particular areas of Numeracy; we then ordered these to produce guides which indicated possible starting points, particular emphases, likely outcomes and suggestions for further work. We were able to co-ordinate books, study packs, videos and computer programmes and link the topics to elements of Numberpower.

The Guides are displayed on a revolving stand holding A4 sheets in plastic wallets. Students and tutors are able to remove them, use them and photocopy them so the student has a personal checklist –

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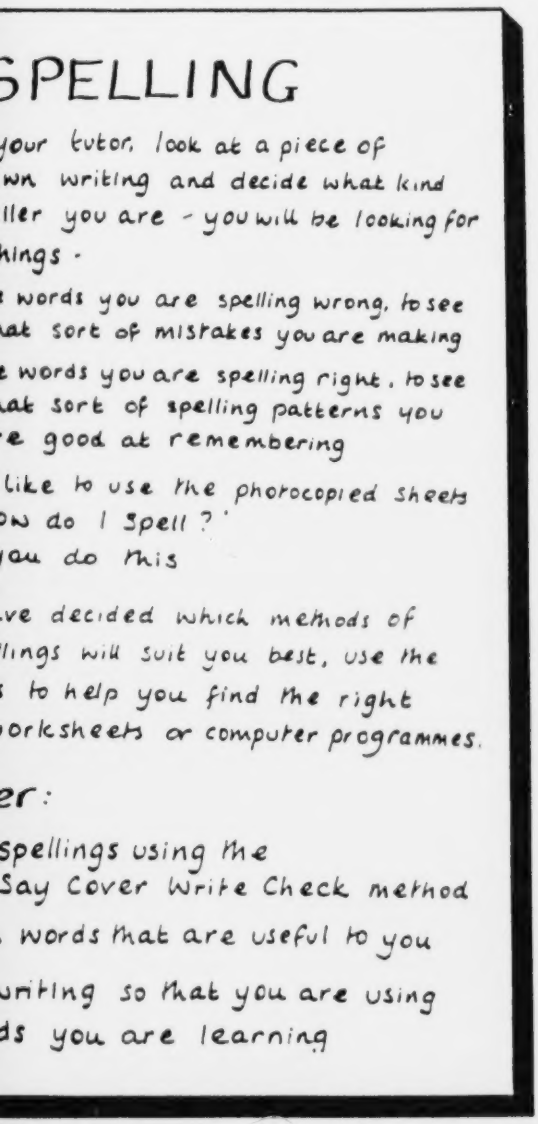

SPELLING

your tutor, look at a piece of
wn writing and decide what kind
ller you are - you will be looking for
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words you are spelling wrong, to see
at sort of mistakes you are making

words you are spelling right, to see
at sort of spelling patterns you
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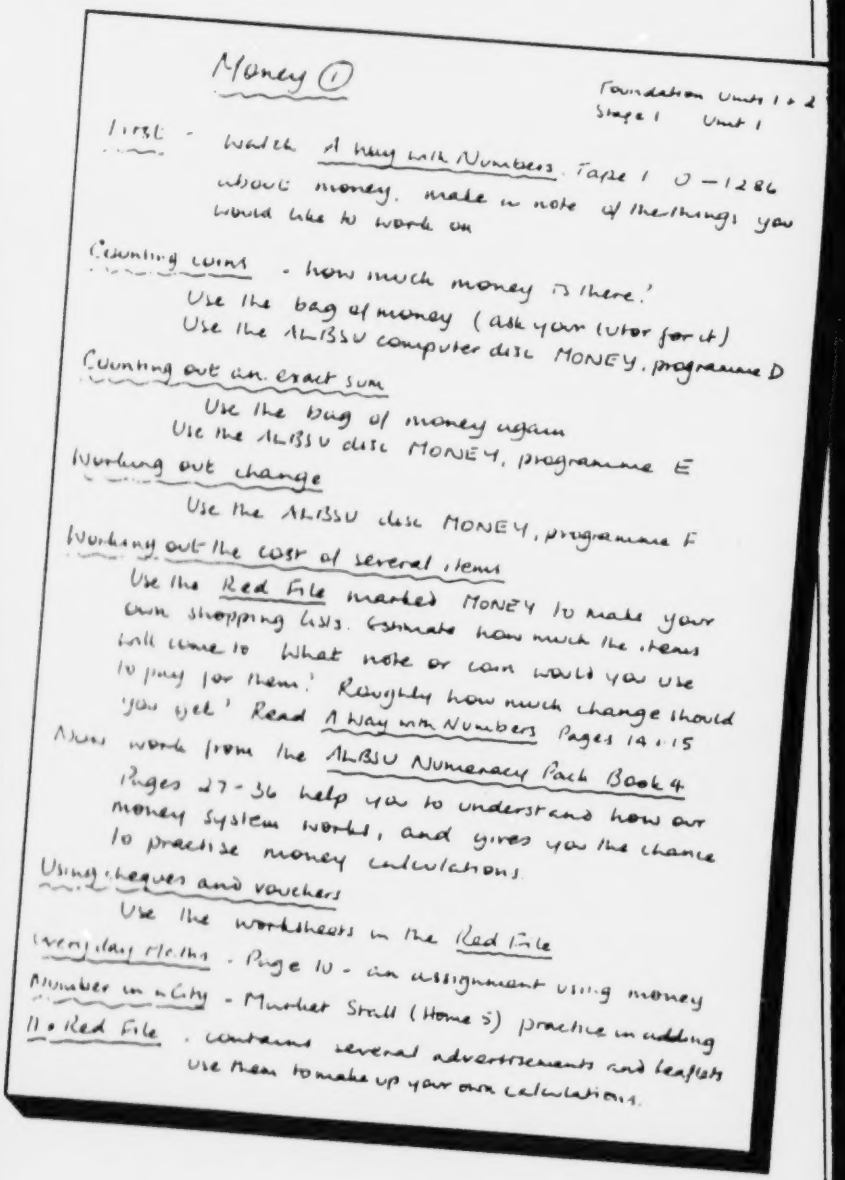

Money (1)

Foundation Units 1 & 2
Stage 1 Unit 1

First - Watch A Way with Numbers. Tape 1 0 - 1286 about money. make a note of the things you would like to work on

Counting coins - how much money is there?
Use the bag of money (ask your tutor for it)
Use the ALBSU computer disc MONEY, programme D

Counting out an exact sum
Use the bag of money again
Use the ALBSU disc MONEY, programme E

Working out change
Use the ALBSU disc MONEY, programme F

Working out the cost of several items
Use the Red File marked MONEY to make your own shopping lists. Estimate how much the items will come to. What note or coin would you use to pay for them? Roughly how much change should you get? Read A Way with Numbers Pages 14 - 15

Now work from the ALBSU Numeracy Pack Book 4
Pages 27 - 36 help you to understand how our money system works, and gives you the chance to practise money calculations.

Using cheques and vouchers
Use the worksheets in the Red File

Everyday Maths - Page 10 - an assignment using money

Number in a City - Market Stall (Home 5) practice in adding

11 a Red File - contains several advertisements and leaflets Use them to make up your own calculations.

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which in most cases indicates the individual choices made from the suggestions on the sheet.

Although people have queried the use of handwriting as opposed to word-processing, having given this some thought, we decided to retain the present appearance and layout of the Guides in the hope that this would encourage 'ownership' by all – i.e. students and tutors would feel more ready to add their own comments and suggestions if these could be quickly written in and still be in keeping with the style of the sheet.

We next turned our attention to Spelling – again an area with a wealth of resources of varying approaches and levels of difficulty.

An effective approach to solving spelling problems depends crucially on what the individual student brings to the situation.

As Cynthia Klein points out in 'Specific Learning Difficulties' (ALBSU Newsletter, Winter 1989) it is important to determine the student's strengths and weaknesses in terms of sensory acuity, perception and memory and to analyse the *kind* of mistakes being made, to decide on the method of learning likely to be most appropriate.

Therefore we approached the production of the Spelling Guides slightly differently, being concerned to offer the individual student a choice of approaches consistent with particular needs. The Guides thus reflect the variety of possible ways of tackling spelling – looking at spelling patterns, adding endings, using sounds, etc., hence the importance of the general introduction to the Guides, which stresses the need to analyse present strengths and weaknesses before adopting a particular approach.

Although the work involved in putting the Guides together was extensive, we do now feel it was well worth the effort. There is an overall sense of having 'organised' the resources – we know now where everything is, which has avoided a lot of frustration searching through books and packs to find the appropriate section, wasting valuable time in the process. The resources have been 'opened up' and, more importantly, the Guides have meant that the use of multiple resources by the students is coherent and planned rather than based on the haphazard discovery of something else on the topic in question, which might in fact have been more useful if it had been looked at first.

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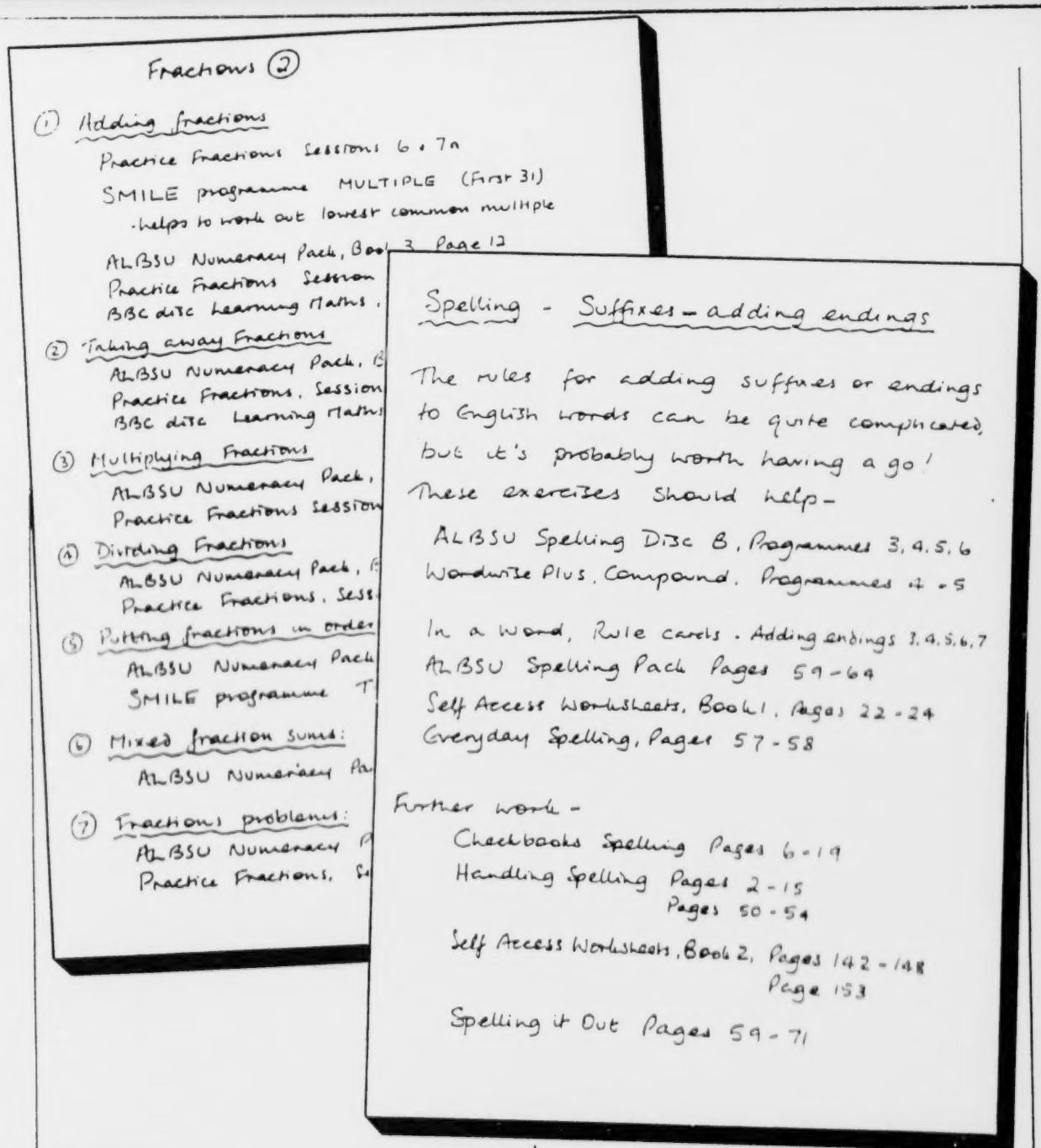

Fractions (2)

(1) Adding fractions
Practice Fractions Sessions 6 & 7a
SMILE programme MULTIPLE (First 31)
- helps to work out lowest common multiple
ALBSU Numeracy Pack, Book 3 Page 12
Practice Fractions Session
BBC disc Learning Maths.

(2) Taking away Fractions
ALBSU Numeracy Pack, B
Practice Fractions. Session
BBC disc Learning Maths

(3) Multiplying Fractions
ALBSU Numeracy Pack,
Practice Fractions Session

(4) Dividing Fractions
ALBSU Numeracy Pack,
Practice Fractions. Sess

(5) Putting fractions in order
ALBSU Numeracy Pack
SMILE programme T

(6) Mixed fraction sums:
ALBSU Numeracy Pa

(7) Fractions problems:
ALBSU Numeracy P
Practice Fractions. Se

Spelling - Suffixes - adding endings

The rules for adding suffixes or endings to English words can be quite complicated, but it's probably worth having a go! These exercises should help -

ALBSU Spelling Disc B, Programmes 3, 4, 5, 6
Wordwise Plus, Compound. Programmes 4 - 5

In a Word, Rule cards - Adding endings 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
ALBSU Spelling Pack Pages 59 - 64
Self Access Worksheets, Book 1, Pages 22 - 24
Everyday Spelling, Pages 57 - 58

Further work -
Checkbooks Spelling Pages 6 - 19
Handling Spelling Pages 2 - 15
Pages 50 - 54
Self Access Worksheets, Book 2, Pages 142 - 148
Page 153
Spelling it Out Pages 59 - 71

Outcomes

The Guides have also made it a lot easier and more practicable for students themselves to be involved in the choice of appropriate resources. Access to relevant resources is straightforward and the student can survey all that is available before starting work. In this way the student makes decisions about the level of work that he or she feels comfortable with, also decisions about how much or how little work needs to be done on a particular topic to meet individual goals; if further work is needed, it is easy to find follow up material.

The Guides have thus contributed significantly to the development of independence, in that they have encouraged a 'mix and match' approach to the use of resources based on individual needs and preferences rather than relying on tutors to suggest appropriate resources.

Although initially the tutor is involved in advising as to choice, gradually this input diminishes as students become more familiar with both the system and the resources themselves, and get to know which approach suits them best.

The Guides, therefore, have achieved two major aims. They have made the resources accessible in that specific sections of books or packs, specific elements of computer programs and particular tracks on videos are easily available for use; they have also, in encouraging individual routes through resources, geared to individually defined goals and work plans, emphasised the whole idea of independent learning by enabling the student to make choices, and take increasingly more responsibility for the planning of work.

No. 44 Winter 1992 – Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, Kingsbourne House, 229-231 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA.
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ISSN 0260-5104

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1992

No 45

NEWSLETTER

ALBSU

The Basic Skills Unit

Photo: Dave Hidley

Progression options at Doncaster College (see page 4)

ESOL – TIME TO START AFRESH?
PAGE 2

PROGRESSION FROM ABE
PAGE 4

THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE STAG
PAGE 6

INTEGRATED BASIC SKILLS
PAGE 10

USING COMPUTERS WITH BILINGUAL STUDENTS
INSERT

ESOL – TIME TO START AFRESH?

In the last few months LEAs have found out whether their bids for Section 11 Funding have been successful. Inevitably with this type of funding there have been some winners as well as some losers and whilst some authorities and colleges are planning on the basis of increased funding, others are deciding where to make cuts. English for Speakers of Other Languages Provision (or ESOL as it's more commonly referred to) is one of the most neglected parts of the education system and under-funding means that large numbers of British citizens and residents are denied access to essential language skills.

A couple of years ago we commissioned and published the first authoritative survey of the need for English Language amongst speakers of other languages. This revealed a substantial need, as well as indicated that many of those who wanted help did not know that it was available. The survey also revealed that people who needed help to improve their English were not a homogeneous group and included those with little formal education in any language as well as adults who had received considerable education, albeit in another country and in another language. Many of those surveyed wanted to improve their English for work related reasons, such as a better job, regular employment or access to skills training, although parenting concerns also figured significantly.

This survey provided powerful evidence for the development of existing ESOL programmes and the establishment of new programmes. Based on the survey, and a round of regional consultation conferences, we developed focused and realistic proposals for the development of ESOL – proposals which would have built on the strength of existing provision and extended the opportunities available in the future. We did not suggest that ALBSU should be solely charged with the development of ESOL, particularly as some of the needs revealed were outside our basic remit, and we were keen that the experience and skills of support groups, such as NATECLA (the National Association for Teaching English and Other Community Languages) should be used. It is disappointing that the government was not willing to make the very modest funding available to support the development of ESOL; however, we don't intend to give up making the case.

SECTION 11 – TIME TO GO?

One of the first steps which needs to be taken in the next year or two, we believe, is to stop funding ESOL work with adults through Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. Funding ESOL in the 1990s on an Act passed at a time when immigration from the new Commonwealth was a recent phenomenon is illogical. It perpetuates the idea of assimilation of immigrants into Great Britain when almost everyone now recognises the need to develop a society which values the strength of diverse and rich cultures. Funding ESOL programmes via the Home Office also indicates for many people a, not very subtle, connection between ESOL and immigration and an even more worrying connection with nationality and status.

Of course, Section 11 funding has been revised and modified over the years, although it is difficult to see whether revisions have made funding more appropriate or merely more difficult. Furthermore, despite some recent change in the operation of Section 11, some much needed changes have never taken place. For instance, Section 11 funding is confined by the 1966 Act to people of Commonwealth origin and this no longer reflects the situation in most ESOL programmes in England and Wales. Currently refugees are excluded from tuition funded via Section 11 (although many ESOL programmes breach the Act and keep quiet!) as are other people of non-Commonwealth origin. Free movement in the European Community and the opening up of travel and national borders has made this restriction illogical and nonsensical. Thus, a Greek citizen who wishes to settle in the UK and needs to learn or improve English can do so but provision cannot be funded through Section 11. To be fair, this problem has been recognised; but the restriction remains because a change in the law is required. It says much for the low priority attached to ESOL and the needs of minority ethnic groups that time has yet to be made for the change in the law required.

The relatively recent revision of the operation of Section 11 funding has not, in our view, been helpful. Funding is now based on the idea of ESOL as a number of

short-term projects, funding of which can either be taken over in three years time when Section 11 funding ceases or the need for which will have disappeared after a relatively short period. Both appear to be vain hopes. Hard pressed colleges and other agencies will find it difficult to continue funding when central funding ceases and there will be a real danger that existing provision will collapse. British education has been full of short-term measures to meet continuing need and there is little evidence to support the view of ESOL as a short-term need. Short-term project funding is not an effective way of funding long-term programmes, although project funding can be a useful way of funding innovation and development.

As far as we can tell the way the current round has operated has left considerable confusion. Some unsuccessful bidders do not seem to know why their proposals were turned down, some funding has been agreed on a tapering basis, some proposals have been agreed only for three years and other funding appears not to have any specific conditions attached. It's also not very clear how Section 11 funding is to be monitored and the value of the programmes funded evaluated. Certainly we are not aware of the guidelines for monitoring Section 11 or the criteria for evaluation or the performance indicators and targets for the programme as a whole. In fact very little monitoring appears to have taken place of Section 11 ESOL funding since this method of funding was established, except through occasional HMI inspection. Undoubtedly a good deal of variety exists in ESOL programmes and it is doubtful whether Section 11 has had much impact on improving quality and setting standards. In our view Section 11 funding for ESOL needs scrapping, not further revision.

ESOL AND THE FUNDING COUNCILS

Some hopeful signs do exist, however. Whatever you think of the legislation in general, The Further and Higher Education Act 1992, which was passed just before the General Election, makes the Further Education Funding Councils (FEFC) in England and in Wales responsible for ESOL as part of Schedule 2 to the Act. It is unlikely that the FEFC will be able to discharge this duty if the major source of funding is through a programme administered by the Home Office. Separating the duty and the funding is unlikely to be workable.

What is crucial, even in the short-term, is that funding for ESOL is 'ring-fenced'. Left to 'market forces' we doubt if the scale of ESOL provision will be maintained as colleges come under pressure to switch funding to other areas of work. Language support for existing college students and ESOL programmes for minority ethnic adults and young people will suffer a sharp decline in scale and quality and it will be difficult, of not impossible, to restore these programmes when the pressure on funding lessens. The 'market' may work effectively in all sorts of areas of education and training where demand is the most important element; the 'market' is not appropriate for ensuring access and for meeting the needs of the educationally disadvantaged.

Photo: Peter Ward

Work at Tower Hamlets Open Learning Centre

Of course, some of the problems affecting literacy and numeracy provision for adults will also be faced by ESOL. Although some colleges have considerable experience of ESOL provision, including community based provision, others have very little experience at present, largely because ESOL has been provided by other adult and community education providers in the area. A good deal of collaboration will be necessary if quality is to be maintained and ESOL provision developed and in many areas 'contracting' existing providers will be the most effective way of providing.

Securing provision and funding in the short-term is important but it's not enough. The scale of ESOL provision is already inadequate and too few staff are struggling to provide for too many people with too few resources and too little support. ESOL provision is over stretched in almost every area where minority ethnic groups have settled and long waiting lists are becoming the norm. Many London Boroughs are overwhelmed with refugees and yet do not have the funds to provide access to English language. In other areas, where the minority ethnic population is fairly small, trained and experienced staff are few, and often English language learners end up in inappropriate adult literacy groups. This is really no way to indicate that minority ethnic people are an important part of this society – valued and respected for the contribution they make.

A NEW START

So a new start is needed. We need to shake off the assimilationist past, get rid of short-term strategies and funding and start attempting to make a realistic estimate of need and provide the necessary resources. Over the next few months we intend to review our strategy towards ESOL and begin to formulate new proposals to government. Although our modest proposals for development did not succeed, we do not intend to forget about ESOL or cease to campaign to reverse past neglect. Some limited development is already taking place by refocussing some of our existing grant and we now support rather more ESOL related projects and will publish more English language material than we did a few years ago. We know that it's not by any means enough, however, and that's why we will make wider ranging proposals for development.

Campaigning for ESOL provision which is well resourced, of high quality and more adequately meets likely need is a high priority for ALBSU. Not because we want a 'bigger empire' or need the work; but because it's about time that people who need access to English language learning and improvement – people who contribute much to our society – got a fair deal. ■

PROGRESSION FROM ABE

Elaine Cookson, Basic Skills Co-ordinator at Doncaster College, describes a range of work, undertaken in part through an ALBSU project, which has assisted students moving on from basic education to other courses.

Mapping out the Routes

Progression from a basic education class has been described as 'stepping out of the warm bath syndrome' – it is comfortable in the warm water, you know that you've stayed long enough, but it might be cold and uncomfortable when you first step out.

Our task was to devise a structured programme of information and support which would enable students who wished to progress to do so by making informed choices with support and guidance at each key stage.

The Barriers to Progression

Preliminary discussions with ABE students and staff helped us to identify the following barriers to progression:

- low levels of knowledge about courses and progression routes
- low levels of information gathering strategies
- low levels of confidence in decision making and study skills
- fear of large, impersonal buildings
- fear of letting go completely from basic skills support.

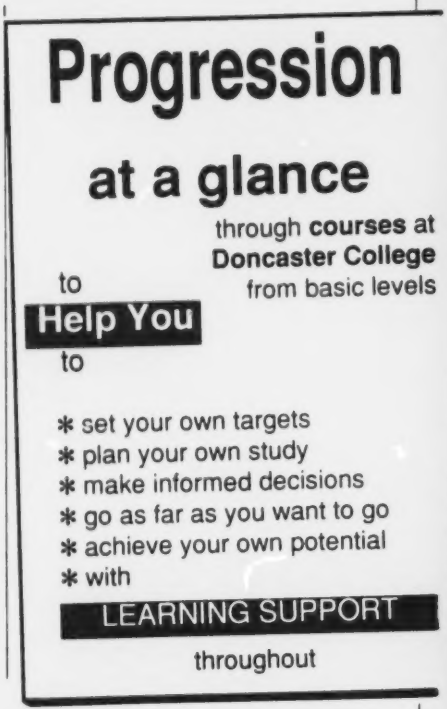
We used these five barriers as a basis for our remedial action plan to increase progression from basic education classes and decided upon a co-ordinated approach. There was a need for 'product' and 'process' – the 'product' of clear, factual information and confidence building processes such as visits to the College, meeting key staff, and a bridging course to include decision making, and study skills.

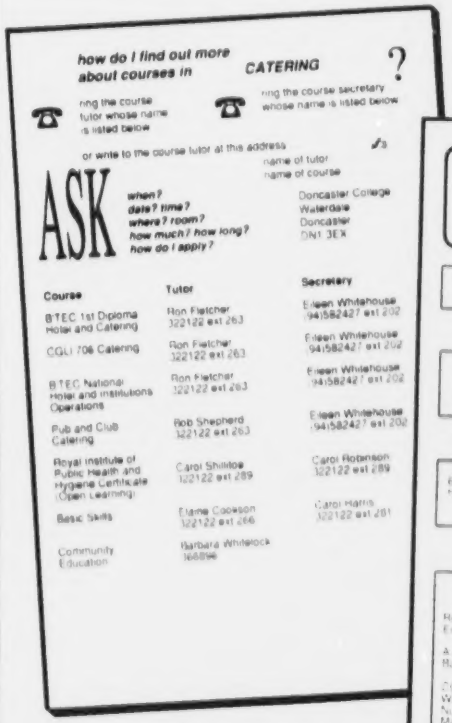
Dissolving the barriers

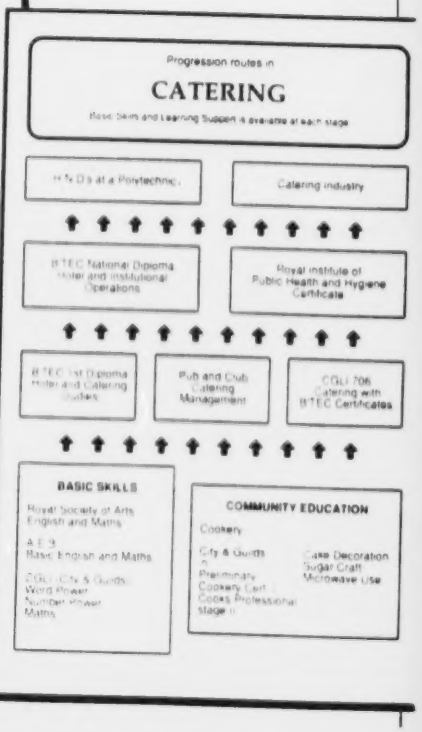
'Knowledge itself is power', according to Frances Bacon. We realised at an early stage that the main way in which we could help ABE students was to empower them to help themselves and most of them simply did not know what courses were available. This factor limited their aspirations and their short term and long term goals.

We felt that words alone were not enough – there was practical work to be done. We tackled each barrier in the following ways:

- designed a booklet which mapped through routes – from ABE – through all college courses using clear language and diagrams
- included names, telephone numbers and postal addresses of every course tutor and secretary with tips on what questions to ask
- mounted a College Open Day in June, especially for ABE students to meet key staff in areas that *they had chosen*
- provided a bridging course during the Summer vacation for ABE progressees to increase confidence in decision making and study skills
- opened a Learning Support Workshop with drop-in facilities from 10.00am – 8.00pm daily, to continue basic skills support throughout their studies.




how do I find out more about courses in
CATERING
?
ring the course tutor whose name is listed below
ring the course secretary whose name is listed below
or write to the course tutor at this address
name of tutor
name of course
Doncaster College
Waterdale
Doncaster
DN1 3EX
ASK
when?
date? time?
where? room?
how much? how long?
how do I apply?
Course
Tutor
Secretary
BTEC 1st Diploma Hotel and Catering
Ron Fletcher 322122 ext 263
Eileen Whitehouse 941582427 ext 202
CGLI 706 Catering
Ron Fletcher 322122 ext 263
Eileen Whitehouse 941582427 ext 202
BTEC National Hotel and Institutions Operations
Ron Fletcher 322122 ext 263
Eileen Whitehouse 941582427 ext 202
Pub and Club Catering
Rob Shepherd 322122 ext 263
Eileen Whitehouse 941582427 ext 202
Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene Certificate (Open Learning)
Carol Shirlaw 322122 ext 289
Carol Robinson 322122 ext 289
Basic Skills
Elaine Cookson 322122 ext 266
Carol Harris 322122 ext 281
Community Education
Barbara Whitelock 368596


Progression routes in
CATERING
Basic Skills and Learning Support is available at each stage
H N D's at a Polytechnic
Catering Industry
BTEC National Diploma Hotel and Institutional Operations
Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene Certificate
BTEC 1st Diploma Hotel and Catering Studies
Pub and Club Catering Management
CGLI 706 Catering with BTEC Certificates
BASIC SKILLS
Royal Society of Arts English and Maths
A.E.B. Basic English and Maths
CGLI City & Guilds Word Power Number Power Maths
COMMUNITY EDUCATION
Cookery
City & Guilds
Preliminary Cookery Cert.
Cookery Professional Stage II
Cake Decoration
Sugar Craft
Microwave Use

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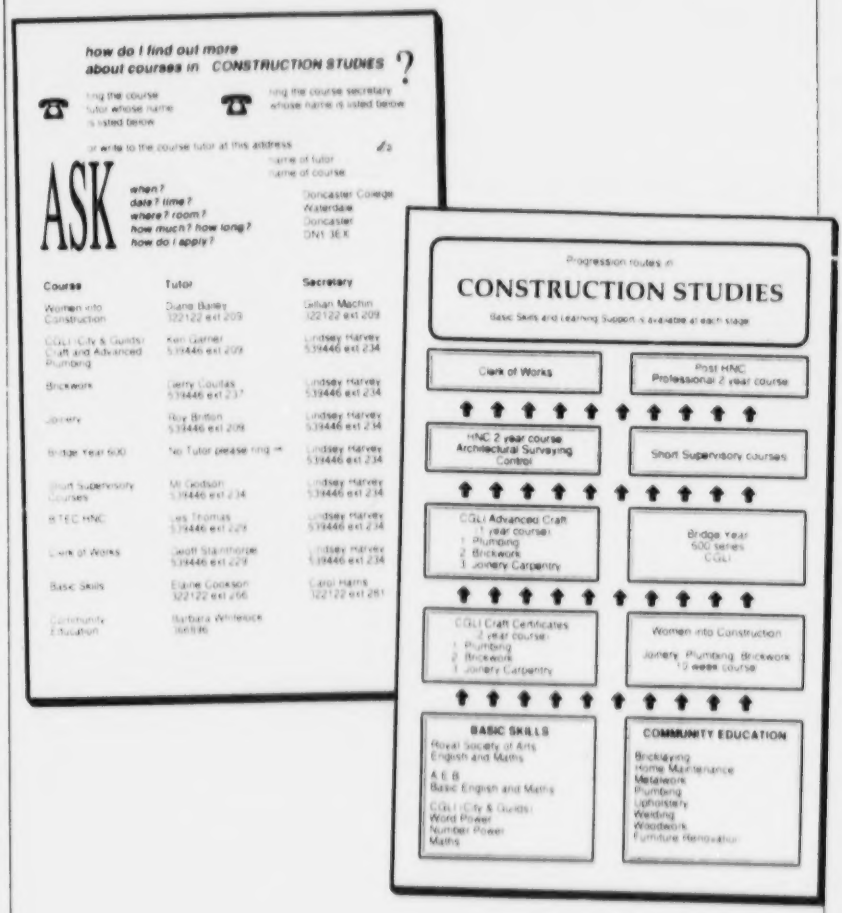
Mapping the routes

The first principle, in designing the brochure, was to ensure that it was designed for ABE students in terms of their needs. This had implications for layout in terms of font (Homerton, Archimedes), size of letters, headings, the introductory pages, the contents pages and cover.

Students appreciated the clarity of information and the fact that their courses were mentioned on every page in addition to the more obvious features of the brochure such as:

- clear advice on how to use the brochure
- clear, diagnostic progression routes on every page
- 'help' pages for ABE students facing every page
- name, addresses and phone numbers of every course tutor alongside the course maps
- tips on writing for information and phoning for information on every page
- clear advice on 'what to do next'.

The brochure has proved to be very popular with colleagues locally, regionally and nationally – but, more importantly, it is popular with students of all ability. Parents, Careers Officers and TEC's all seem to warm to the clarity of information presented in the brochure which tends to confirm what we all feel to be true about good practice in ABE – it is good practice in a much wider context.



Open Day for ABE Students

On our preliminary visits to all ABE classes we had asked students to let us know of any areas of study which they might consider in terms of progression. They suggested Catering, Joinery, Computing, GCSE's, Children's Literature and Agriculture as areas on which they would like further information. We duly invited staff from each area to meet ABE students at the allotted time and they all turned up, along with other key colleagues from Educational Guidance, Access, Community Education and Client Services. We expected around twenty or thirty students (feared that we might get six) and, in the event we were delighted and slightly overwhelmed when seventy students arrived, bright eyed and uninhibited to form queues at each table, eagerly seeking advice on progression.

Bridging the gap

The Bridging Course took place the week before enrolment week, in September. The College was relatively quiet, so tours of the building, Refectory and Library were stress-free and pleasant.

The course content included Decision Making Skills, Study Skills and How to Make Choices at a variety of levels including choice of 'project' or 'topic' in GCSE's, essay titles and, of course subjects and modules of courses.

The emphasis on student strengths and interests resulted in several changes of GCSE subjects and course modules which had been made rather hastily in June.

Student support workshop

Progressees, and other students on College courses who need help in basic skills can drop in to the Learning Support Workshop at any time between 10.00 am and 8.00 pm daily.

On joining the workshop students have the opportunity to negotiate a programme of help in English, Maths and Study Skills. Vocational and personal counselling is available to them and the Welcome Pack includes the means of self assessment of prior learning. Student evaluation of their programme is built in to the workshop procedures as is appropriate accreditation.

The Workshop has open access materials, and can seat up to thirty five students, who learn in a wide variety of ways. We have 120 students for Learning Support and a further 230 for Basic Skills only.

The progressees have a support group within the workshop and often stay behind two evenings per week to complete their GCSE assignments.

Conclusion

We measured progression from ABE to Vocational (including GCSE) courses the year before the project and again after the first year. The increase, in the cohort described, was 11% after the first year of the project.

The booklet has now been updated in terms of course changes, personnel changes, etc., and 1,000 copies have been distributed locally, regionally and nationally.

We are now busily embedding the procedures learned into college mechanisms and have enjoyed tremendous support from the Principalships in so doing.

The Project has inspired a great deal of commitment and staff development – but most of all it has empowered a lot of students to step out of that warm bath water and join the mainstream of college and community life. ■

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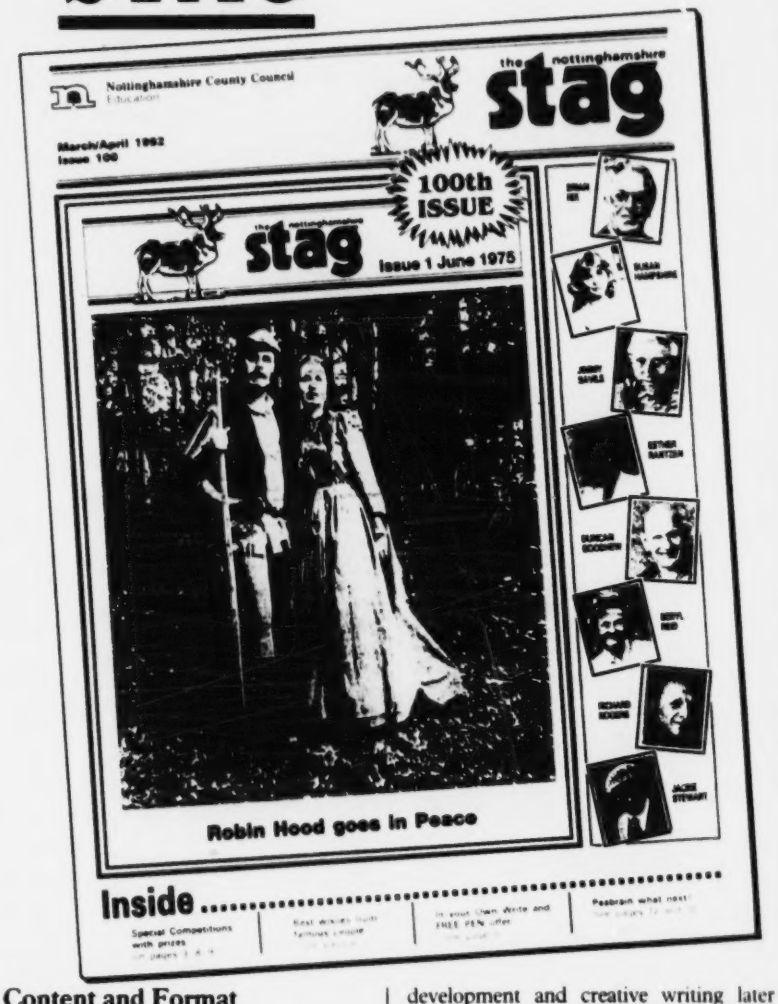
THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE STAG

The Nottinghamshire Stag has just published its one hundredth issue. In this article the editor, Ian Hill, describes the history and development of the newspaper, produced specifically for adults working on improving their basic skills.



Starting the Paper

The Nottinghamshire Stag, which published its 100th edition in April, is a newspaper local to Nottinghamshire but available for sale throughout the United Kingdom and in fact has over the years had a limited distribution around the world. It is aimed primarily at adults with problems in reading but despite its low reading level is not condescending in any way and is available free to residents of Nottinghamshire.

The Editorial Board of *The Nottinghamshire Stag* comprises a team of volunteers associated with the local services concerned with education in its widest sense, a combination that over the years under the editorship of Mr Allan Meakin, the founder and first editor, Mr Gordon Howlett, the second editor and since 1981, Issue 36, Mr Ian Hill the current editor has brought together resources and expertise that have in turn produced, as amateurs, what is a truly a professional newspaper.

After investigating the realms of point size, typeface, columns per page and number of pages, typesetting by computer, photographic reproduction and many more technical points concerned with low reading level the Board approached the Nottinghamshire Education Committee in 1975 with a specimen front page of what was to become an eight page tabloid paper produced every two months. The Board received the full support and backing of the Education Committee and on the 25th June 1975 the first issue of *The Nottinghamshire Stag* appeared with a print run of 4,000 copies. Such is its popularity that the circulation is currently running at over 13,000 copies per issue.

Content and Format

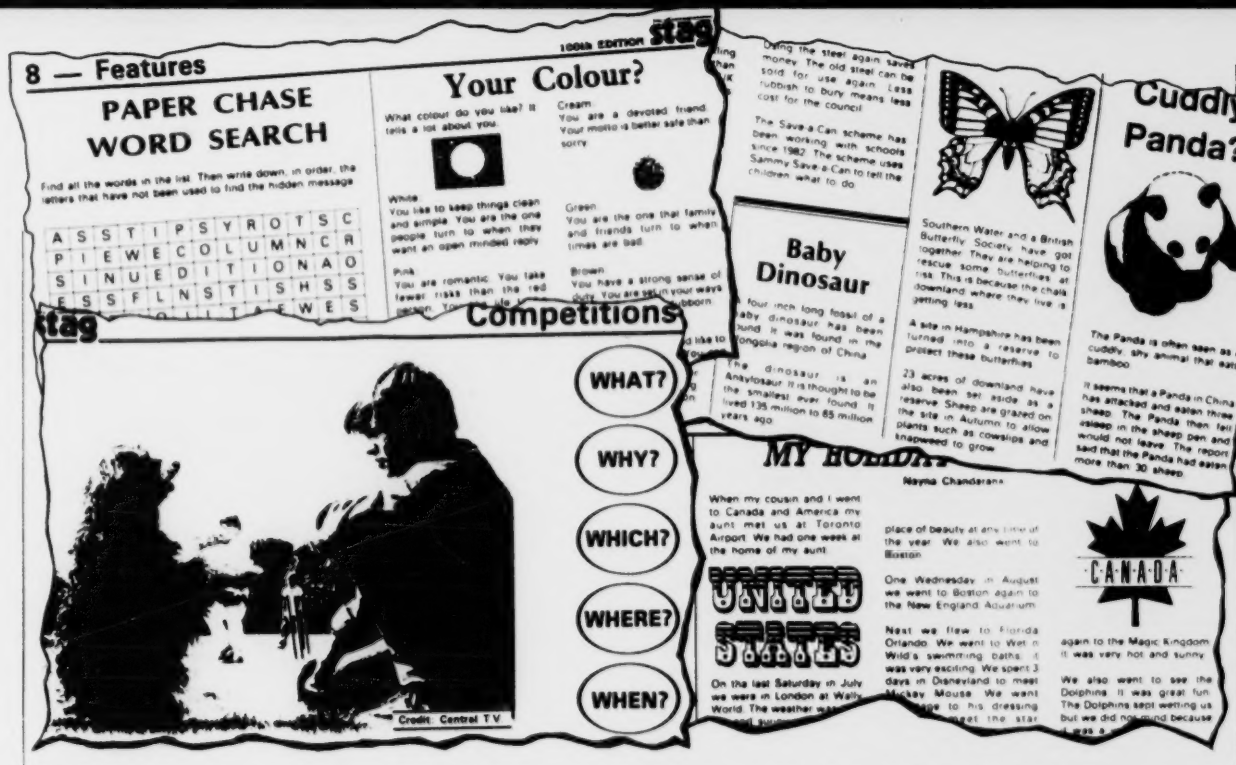
Until recently the paper always led with a full front page feature story with colour treatment. *The Nottinghamshire Stag* is aimed at as wide a cross section of the population as possible. Towards this end it covers news, sport, cooking, beauty, music, home and leisure, motoring and a wide range of topics of general interest as well as a quiz and crossword spot.

Starting with three columns per page the format was soon changed to four columns, a move which was to remain as the foundation upon which all future issues were to be planned. This search for a real adult look was brought a stage nearer in the issue marking the Queen's Silver Jubilee when a major change in layout occured. It was at this time that a half page picture was introduced as a vehicle for language development and creative writing later becoming the page three *'Picture Talk'*.

From the earliest days the *Letters to the Editor* feature encouraged student writing and by 1980, issue 20, the demand for the inclusion of more general items from readers brought about *'In your own write'* which today covers a full page. Issue 31 saw a change of printer and the influence of a commercial newspaper approach on the visual impact of the paper and another major layout development. *The Nottinghamsire Stag* had become a real newspaper.

Changes and Developments

The formation of a writing team opened up new horizons, the use of the house colour and the addition of a second colur helped to



highlight stories and the involvement of more people in the detail of the planning of individual pages are but three developments that have offered exciting possibilities for those involved in the production of this unique contribution to the world of Adult Literacy.

Whilst its identity as a newspaper together with its main features remain, *The Nottinghamshire Stag* is now going through a period in its evolution where it is more flexible in approach. Experiments have been tried with mixes of one, two or three column text, the use of student work as main items of copy, challenging pictures, alternative layouts etc., all of which led to another move forward in the challenge of being a real newspaper.

The issue of October/November 1988, number 80, marks the point when the Editorial Board decided to go for a more modern approach to bring the paper into line with the developments that were taking place in the national daily papers. The banner heading was changed to a lighter look and an *Inside* taster line was added to the foot of the front page. The addition of rules, both horizontal and vertical, the wider use of the two colours in more adventurous ways, together with the grouping of items into feature pages, again lifted the image of *The Nottinghamshire Stag* on to a new plane.

Making the Paper

And what of the future? The paper of March/April 1992 marks the one hundredth issue and as such a sixteen page special edition is being planned. This is only the second time *The Nottinghamshire Stag* has run to sixteen pages, the first was issue 83 when the volume of student writing demanded extra space.

You could be part of the success story.

- More writers are needed!
- More Board members are needed!

If you are willing to give a little of your time as a volunteer get in touch with *The Editor, Ian Hill*, by writing to him at:

The Editor,
c/o The Further Education Group,
County Hall,
West Bridgford,
Nottingham. NG2 7QP.

- Remember also your copies could be FREE!

If you live in Nottinghamshire you can obtain it FREE from the address above.

If you are a school teacher or tutor in Nottinghamsire you can obtain it in class quantities again FREE, from the address above. For those of you outside Nottinghamshire it is possible to buy copies either singly or in bulk again from the address above.

The Editorial Board hopes to see this ambassador for Basic Education in Nottinghamshire continue into the 21st century, but more importantly continue to be a success story for people of all ages as they come to terms with the struggles of learning to read. ■

John Booker Trust Fund

Colleagues may be aware that John Booker, who worked in the field of ABE for many years, died suddenly and tragically last July, after a short illness following a stroke.

John is greatly missed by his many friends and colleagues, and at a special memorial event held in Manchester last December to celebrate his life a collection of £950 was raised, with which it is hoped to set up a Trust in John's name. After an initial donation to the Woodland Trust, the rest of the money will be used to support work linked to the Gatehouse Books publishing project, with which John was closely involved. It is unclear at this stage whether this will be a one-off project, e.g. to fund a publication, or whether it will be possible to raise enough money to set up a permanent fund to support work on a continuing basis.

We believe that there may be many other people who knew John and his work, particularly in Adult Basic Education, who may like to contribute to the Fund. If you would like more information, or would like to make a donation (cheques payable to The Gatehouse Project), please contact:

The John Booker Trust, c/o 1 Torbay Road, Chorlton, Manchester M21 2XE or telephone 061-225 7205 (24-hour answerphone).

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Information

Resources – A Guide to Material in Adult Literacy & Basic Skills

This new edition of *Resources* includes some 200 new titles. Each title is reviewed, and there are selections of the most popular material in literacy and numeracy, as chosen by practitioners from England and Wales.

Helpful information is also given on materials suitable for basic skills work in employment training programmes, for help with specific learning difficulties and open and flexible learning.

ISBN 1 870741 331

Price: £10.50

Postage: 1 copy 93p

ALBSU Standards for Basic Skills Teachers

ALBSU has produced a set of Standards which describe the competences of basic skills teachers. They spell out in detail what competent basic skills teachers do to achieve the key purpose of their role. The Standards state that the Key Purpose is to help individuals achieve their potential by developing the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and language.

The ALBSU Standards are based on the framework used by the Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) in developing standards for trainers and assessors. With some modifications to fit the requirements of an education based service, Units and Elements of the TDLB Standards have been used to describe the functions carried out by basic skills teachers.

The Standards may be used to design nationally recognised qualifications for basic skills teachers. ALBSU has collaborated with City and Guilds to produce the assessment guidelines for a new award based on the Standards – The Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills (9285) which replaces the 9281.

The Standards may also be used to generate job specifications, staff development programmes and for the appraisal of staff and provision.

Copies of the ALBSU Standards for Basic Skills Teachers have been sent to LEAs and colleges of further education. Additional copies are available from ALBSU price £9.00. Postage 93p per copy.

Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills

Literacy: Numeracy: English for Speakers of Other Languages (ALBSU/City & Guilds 9282/3/4)

From April 1992 City and Guilds will be offering a revised version of the Initial Certificate programme which includes training for staff wanting to teach English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as well as Literacy and Numeracy. The programme will be managed by the Regional Advisory Councils and the WJEC.

ALBSU recommends the *Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills* as the expected minimum qualification for any person assisting with the teaching of basic skills (literacy, numeracy or ESOL) to adults or young people. The award indicates that candidates have been assessed on their teaching of individual students. The programme is intended for new staff. Experienced staff should be directed to the 9285 Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills.

Addresses of RACs and approved centres for the Initial Certificate are available from Ann Morgan, Division 23, City and Guilds of London Institute, 46 Britannia Street, London WC1X 9RG. Tel: 071-278 2468.

The essential Handbooks giving details of the programme are available price £2.50 plus 50p postage from ALBSU. A free leaflet is also available from the Unit.

Partnership between ABE and Libraries in Warwickshire

Photograph courtesy of Ted Cotterill

The photograph shows (l-r) Desmond Heaps, Head of Community Services, Warwickshire County Library, Councillor Tony Lloyd, Deputy Mayor of Nuneaton and Bedworth, Gordon Stokes, Principal of North Warwickshire College, Peter Monahan, Area Manager, Nuneaton Library and Mrs Irene Lloyd, Deputy Mayoress.

A new service is available to ABE students in Warwickshire thanks to the increased co-operation between Warwickshire County Library and Warwickshire ABE Service.

The County Library Service has just invested more than £6,500 in new ABE materials which are now available in eight libraries across the country. The materials, which include books for study and leisure and teaching aids for tutors, were chosen with the help of a panel of ABE tutors and students.

As part of a long-term partnership, ABE co-ordinators in Warwickshire have worked with library staff to help them understand the particular needs of Adult Basic Education students. Library staff will offer students visits to the library as part of their further education courses.

'The Co-ordinators have given us wonderful support in this ambitious venture,' said Desmond Heaps, Head of Community Services, Warwickshire County Library. *'We are removing barriers which in the past have prevented students from using the library and we can be more confident that they will find modern materials here to suit their individual needs.*

The new service was launched by holding special open evenings in Rugby, Leamington, Nuneaton and Stratford libraries. Tutors and students from each of the four Further Education Colleges in Warwickshire were invited, as well as councillors, governors and other dignitaries.

There are major ABE collections in Rugby, Nuneaton, Stratford and Leamington libraries and smaller collections in Warwick, Kenilworth, Bedworth and Atherstone.

For further details please contact:

Reine Plumpton, ABE Organiser,
North Warwickshire College, Tel: 0203 387245.
Desmond Heaps,
Warwickshire County Library, Tel: 0926 885537.
Margaret Grantham, ABE Organiser,
Mid-Warwickshire College, Tel: 0926 311711.
Lynda Watts, ABE Organiser,
East Warwickshire College, Tel: 0788 541666.

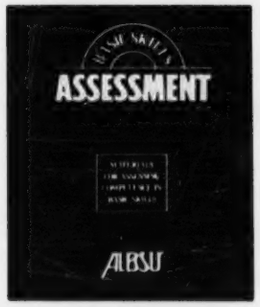
Basic Skills Assessment:

Materials for assessing competence in basic skills

These materials have been developed to help identify the level of basic skills competence of people entering education or training. The competence being identified links directly to that described in the ALBSU standards for basic skills learners. A major purpose for using this assessment material is to help establish the right level at which to start Wordpower and Numberpower.

The assessment will also provide information which can be used to help draw up an individual learning plan for students and trainees. The materials include:

- guidance for assessors
- task sheets
- details of performance criteria against which to assess
- assessment charts



The assessment materials cover reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy.

ISBN 1 870741 38 2

Price: £17.50. Postage £2.25 per copy

'Second Chance' Open Learning, Market Drayton

Mr John Coles

The Basic Skills Open Learning Centre in Market Drayton, North Shropshire comes to the end of its Education Support Grant funding in April 1992 and needed new premises to cater for the increased number of students. The steering group which had been extremely supportive and committed included a local developer, Mr John Coles, who offered to build a new centre for 'Second Chance' in a prime location in the centre of town, which would be leased to North Shropshire College. This would offer increased space, better facilities, high quality furnishings and equipment and would have access for people with disabilities.

The College will be offering a full range of drop-in, Open and Flexible Learning Opportunities to the people of the Market Drayton area when the new Centre opens in September 1992.

The Laura Ashley Foundation

The Laura Ashley Foundation helps individuals between the ages of 18 and 50 years who did not succeed at school in gaining an 'O' level.

Further Education for Individuals

The Foundation helps students with *course fees and some travel costs* on the following types of courses at Further Education Colleges: O and A level; Access; NNEB; BTec; foundation; City & Guilds, etc.

The Foundation *does not help* with dance or drama students, distance learning, or those going to polytechnics or universities or upgrading courses or overseas fees.

Group Funding *(aged 18-50 years)*

The Foundation funds group courses for:

- the development of ability
- opportunities for low achievers
- gaining skills for employment
- Further Education group courses
- Adult Education for advancement to Further and Higher Education opportunities
- Other educational skills for employment or training.

If you have a project please either ring to discuss the details or send details of the project about who it is helping, what they are learning, where they hope to go on to, who is funding the project and what funding you are seeking.

The Administrator, Annabel Thompson, The Laura Ashley Foundation, 33 King Street, London WC2E 8JD. Tel: 071-497 2503.

NATECLA Conference and AGM 1992

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR MULTI-LINGUAL ADULTS
NEW CHALLENGES FOR NATECLA

- National Vocational Qualifications
- Performance Indicators
- Assessment and Record Keeping
- Accreditation of Prior Learning
- Working with TECs
- Access and Progression
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Guidance and Counselling

Keynote Speaker: Shamjeet Shan-Randhawa – General Adviser, National Curriculum, Assessment for Sandwell LEA.

Bookings: Contact Kathleen Jenkins at the NATECLA National Centre, Hall Green College, 520-524 Stratford Road, Birmingham B11 4AJ. Tel: 021-766 6327. All other enquiries to Conference Co-ordinator: Sharon Roopra, Luton College of Higher Education, Tel: 0582 34111, ext 348.

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INTEGRATED BASIC SKILLS – A Pilot Project

A partnership project, between Newham Community College and Newham Community Employment Project, has successfully integrated Wordpower into Community Care and Business Administration courses. It has worked with trainees who have basic skills needs, very few formal qualifications, and a sense that college is 'not for them'. Tim Stephens and Jean Cole, Lecturers in Essential Learning, Newham Community College, describe planning, curriculum, liaison with vocational tutors, and positive outcomes.

Introduction

During the academic year 1990/91 a pilot project was developed between Newham Community College and Newham Community Employment Project which piloted in-house training in basic skills. Our target group were all NCEP trainees. The project was a partnership between the college and NCEP, lecturers were seconded to teach on site at NCEP.

NCEP, a registered charity, is a community based training and education centre that has been serving young people in East London for the past twelve years. It provides training for approximately eighty-five trainees in two occupational areas, namely, City and Guilds Community Care and Pitmans Business Administration.

The trainees

The trainees are all between the ages of sixteen to eighteen and are referred by the Careers Service as having 'Special Training Needs'. This means that for over half English is not their first language, they have few or no formal qualifications (95% have not achieved GCSE at Grade C in any subject), or, notably, they have had a negative school experience. Trainees may have a physical, sensory or learning disability or may come from 'dysfunctional' family backgrounds and have the insecurities this brings. Over 50% of the target group for the pilot project were of Asian or African-Caribbean ethnic origin, and 91% were female.

Although many of these young people have basic skills needs, they are unlikely to seek more conventionally organised basic skills provision or, indeed, apply for vocational courses at the college. They did not see themselves as 'good enough' to go to college and in fact were rather frightened of it. For example, when the college staff brought in the enrolment forms at the start of the Wordpower training, the trainees were really worried that they would be 'made' to go to college.

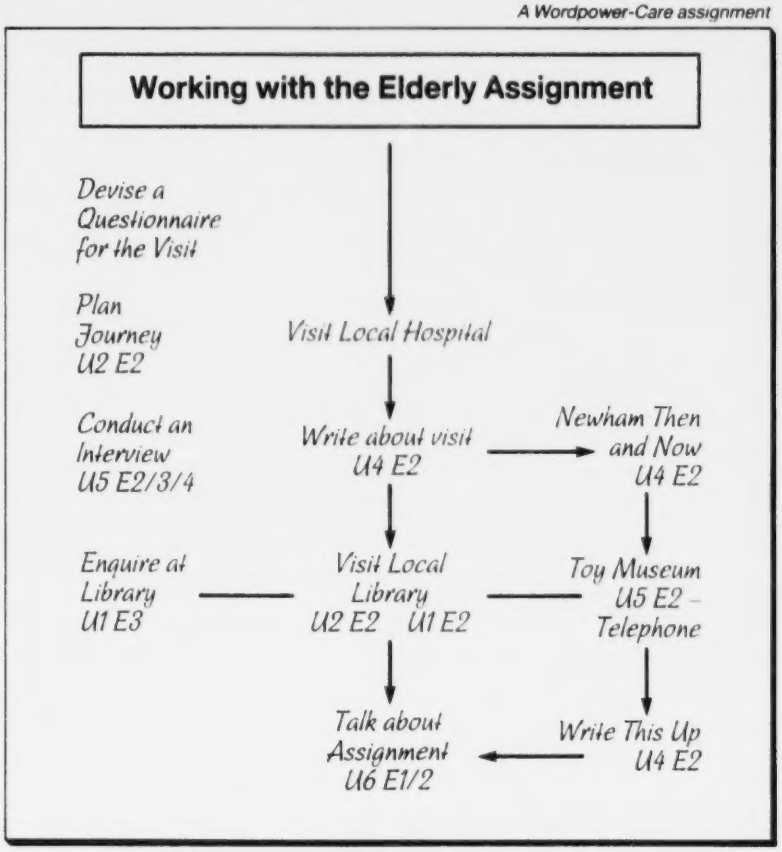
Prior to the pilot project some trainees had attended adult basic educational classes at one of the NCC's local centres for two hours a week. Although the trainees were receiving basic skills training it was not related to their vocational training and the work was not accredited. What made this unsatisfactory was that the tutor was not in any position to really get to know the language demands of the vocational training and could only speak to NCEP staff by phone. Furthermore, because of the number of trainees attending, they virtually took up a whole class on their own, and some adults felt excluded by the 'younger' ethos of the group.

Beginning Wordpower at NCEP

The Wordpower groups are now in their second year, having started in September 1990. The beginning is interesting to reflect upon.

None of the three Basic Skills Lecturers had delivered Wordpower before and there

A Wordpower-Care assignment


Working with the Elderly Assignment
Devise a Questionnaire for the Visit
Plan Journey U2 E2
Visit Local Hospital
Conduct an Interview U5 E2/3/4
Write about visit U4 E2
Newham Then and Now U4 E2
Enquire at Library U1 E3
Visit Local Library U2 E2 U1 E2
Toy Museum U5 E2 – Telephone
Talk about Assignment U6 E1/2
Write This Up U4 E2

were the initial difficulties of what materials to use, how to assess trainees' work and how to interpret some of the criteria and debates about which levels of Wordpower were appropriate for different trainees.

It was enormously helpful that one of the NCEP staff was involved with registering the centre, liaising with City and Guilds and introducing Wordpower to trainees in the Summer prior to us starting. Having a person in-house familiar with Wordpower was invaluable.

However, this also meant that groups were already selected before we began teaching. Two of the lecturers found themselves with mixed vocational groups which proved too complicated to manage; groups were re-organised into Business Administration and Community Care. Also, there were groups of trainees at different ability levels that had to be organised into either Foundation or Stage One groups. It would have been most helpful, therefore, if the Lecturers had been involved in the initial assessment process. This would have saved time.

However, one of the Lecturers found her groups, pre-selected into Foundation and Stage One, workable at the beginning. So, if done properly, initial assessment can help.

Most trainees found Wordpower difficult initially. Comments like; 'I don't know what I have to do', 'It's all too much work' and 'I'll never get it all finished in time... will I?', were very common at first. The range of skills in Wordpower and possible tasks that cover those skills are naturally very broad. We found that trainees relate best to Wordpower once they have a Portfolio and Unit Dividers. With a simple description of the Unit headings trainees began to compare their Wordpower and Vocational Portfolios, and seeing the common elements, were able to get pieces of work cross-accredited.

Developing the Curriculum

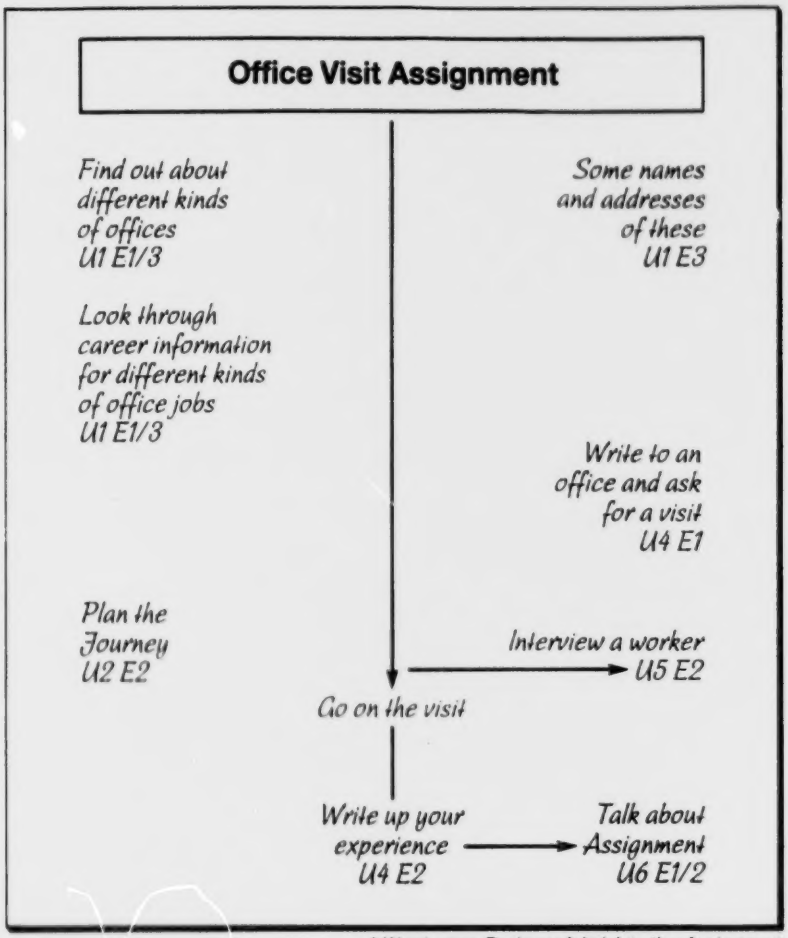
A central aim of the project was to develop an integrated approach to basic skill training.

What does this mean in practice?

Jean Cole describes the approach taken with Community Care.

Community Care

During the first term of Wordpower I mentioned to the Community Care Trainer that I would like to take my group of 14 Stage One trainees on a visit. Did she have any suggestions that would be useful incorporating Community Care and Wordpower? We decided on a visit to a local hospital for the elderly. I discussed the idea with my trainees and they felt it was a marvellous opportunity to learn about the elderly and do Wordpower as well.


Office Visit Assignment
Find out about different kinds of offices U1 E1/3
Look through career information for different kinds of office jobs U1 E1/3
Some names and addresses of these U1 E3
Write to an office and ask for a visit U4 E1
Plan the Journey U2 E2
Interview a worker U5 E2
Go on the visit
Write up your experience U4 E2
Talk about Assignment U6 E1/2

A Wordpower-Business Administration Assignment

At first I had thought only of getting the traineees to write about the day (Unit 4 Element 2) and interviewing the staff and the elderly (Unit 5 Element 2). Looking at this closely I realised I could incorporate many units and elements from this one day.

Talking to the elderly the trainees gathered pieces of information about World War One and Two, sex and marriage, schools, toys and food. We discussed how the interviewing had gone and the trainees were enthusiastic to find out more about what it was like to live in Newham during this period and compare it with life now. The trainees were eager to do project work about this area and became more enthusiastic even asking for homework. Discussing the units and elements that could be achieved through project work meant that the trainees enjoyed working on their projects.

- Getting the main idea from a piece of text and reporting on it, Unit 1 Element 1.
- Using reference material – telephone directory, reference books, Unit 1 Element 3.
- Using a map to get to their destinations, Unit 2 Element 2.
- Writing a letter to various organisations asking for information, Unit 4 Element 2.
- Writing about the interviewing of the elderly, Unit 4 Element 2.
- Interviewing the elderly and staff of the local hospital, Unit 5 Elements 1 and 2.
- Giving information to the group about their project Unit 6 Element 2.

The trainees became more confident and independent about Wordpower, they were learning new skills and realised that learning can be fun and not just sitting in a class staring at a board or working from a worksheet. The most important part about this project was that it was not only useful for Wordpower but also for their Community Care work.

Now Tim Stephens describes the approach he took with Business Administration trainees.

Business Administration

Wordpower has helped me enormously in being able to offer a truly integrated Basic Skills input. Easier in fact than my experience of offering on-going reading and writing in Employment Training.

Photo: Dave Lewis Photography

Work on the Newham Project

Wordpower has been most succesful when I began doing assignment type tasks. I took as a model some of the Business Administration assignments that trainees were already doing for their Pitmans Certificate. One assignment in particular, designed by the Business Administration trainer, involved trainees developing a business proposal. This meant finding a suitable premises, having a product, making up a management team, producing advertising, finding out about loans, drawing plans and tables etc., partly depending on the ingenuity of the group. Needless to say much of this work I could cross-accredit for Wordpower.

The trainees also enjoyed this way of working and by doing assignments had a realistic way of combining many elements from different units.

I set about writing comparable assignments such as: 'Office Visit', 'Community Search', 'What's On', 'Interview', each of which combined elements of Wordpower and Pitmans.

These assignments also had a goal or 'reward' to aim for, namely, a visit, a complimentary ticket, a new experience, etc. Trainees also then came up with their own ideas for assignments in a brainstorm session. For instance, one group of trainees wrote to a local cinema with a sound reason for writing a film review and received tickets, another group produced an assignment describing another Y.T. centre complete with photographs and taped interviews. In this way trainees became fully involved with Wordpower and took responsibility for their completion of the elements. Having an office practice area for the trainees has also been a way of assessing trainees in 'real' situations and is now an integrated part of the Wordpower delivery.

Liaising with Vocational Trainers

During the first term we met with the Community Care and Business Administration Trainers during tea-breaks and lunch-breaks to discuss Wordpower and to find common elements with Pitmans and City and Guilds Community Care. The trainers were keen to see Wordpower working and an improvement in trainees' written and oral communications. We were surprised that there were in fact many common elements and could plan language support type activities to help in Vocational training. We now keep an on-going record, in a shared book, of work we do each week. This includes notices of work we are preparing when we do not have time to talk together. This also ensures that we don't duplicate work and we can reinforce the other's teaching.

It is the basic minimum requirement for staff in this situation to know common elements and skills. The trainers also take it upon themselves to introduce Wordpower to all new trainees even if they cannot join a group immediately. This prepares the trainees and gives them a chance to ask other trainees, already doing Wordpower, about the class. This does make life a lot easier for us in that the trainees are at least aware that Wordpower is a competence based certificate and does not involve an examination.

Working Environment

We were relatively new to Wordpower when the pilot project started and knew of few published materials relevant to trainees' vocational needs. A space was set aside for Wordpower and we thought it essential there should be plenty of resources. Not only worksheets, but books, dictionaries, copies of magazines and newspapers were accessible to the trainees. Having a dedicated working area gives the work importance and recognition.

Conclusion

We have now begun our second year at NCEP and are finding it much easier because of the groundwork done last year. What were the outcomes of the pilot project for trainees? Thirty-nine trainees were involved in the pilot, seventeen have been awarded Wordpower Stage One and four have been awarded Foundation. A further fourteen trainees submitted their work in November 1991 for assessment, twelve passed Stage One and two achieved Foundation certificates.

Furthermore, four trainees gained places on the NNEB course at Newham Community College, one is taking a BTEC National and two are re-taking GCSE English with the College at a local centre.

Two trainees have progressed to full-time employment. Many of the trainees lacked motivation to learn but the Trainers noticed a marked improvement in motivation and trainees' ability to use their skills in their vocational training.

The success of the pilot project has established a partnership between the two organisations whilst trainees have a more positive image of Newham Community College and are not intimidated by the prospect of enrolling on a college course. This is helped by the Lecturers being in-house to give guidance about courses available.

One final point to be mentioned is that in an area with very poor results in formal qualifications the trainees from NCEP have achieved resounding results and the partnership between the two organisations has developed progression towards training and employment locally. ■

'Help Yourself': An English Teaching Video

by Beverley Ward and Tamara MacLachlan

Published by English Language Team, Nottingham Berridge Centre, Stanley Road, Forest Fields, Nottingham NG7 6HW

Price: £20.00 inc. p&p

No ISBN

'Help Yourself', as the title indicates, is a self-help video for Urdu speaking women learning very basic English. It was made by the English Language Scheme in Nottingham and features some of the students. The video lasts about 48 minutes and presents everyday scenes set in the home, college, shops, park and health centre. Each scene is clearly presented in Urdu and the main language structures such as greetings, social language, personal information and requests and replies are introduced. The language is reinforced in dialogues in the subsequent scenes.

There is a great need for such videos to promote enjoyable and independent language learning and 'Help Yourself' certainly gives the students independence to select and practice sections at will. There is a stress on useful access skills, for example, in the college office, Post Office and Health Centre, whilst essential language, particularly on getting and giving personal information is repeated in different situations for consolidation and language transfer. The comprehensive Urdu introduction aids listening skills by allowing students to anticipate phrases they will hear in the dialogues. The video could also be used to practice and develop class work or home taught lessons.

However, presenting simple language as *communications* and not just sentence patterns is very difficult and the video does not succeed in this sense. Unfortunately the dialogue in the acted scenes is very stilted and sounds like the recitation of rehearsed sentences. This is not real, everyday speech since there is no sense of the dynamics of exchanges in real conversation. Appropriate body language, so helpful in the early stages of learning languages is neglected, even in those scenes where it would have been especially appropriate, for example, in the home, the friends in the park and the health visitor.

So, although using relevant language and potentially realistic settings, 'Help Yourself' has missed an opportunity to make simple language 'come alive' and to enable the students to get a feel for it in context. Nonetheless, this is a very worthwhile pioneering project to build confidence in very basic students who will welcome the chance to take control of their own listening and speaking practice.

Monica Tyler & Jasmin Khan
English at Home Schemes Organisers
Leeds Education Authority

An Introduction to Book-keeping

by John Bentley and Cherryll West

Published by Bristol and West Tutorial Services, 8 Quarry Way, Nailsea, Avon, BS19 1EQ

Price: £35.00 plus p&p

No ISBN

This resource presents a simplified approach to learning elementary book-keeping. As such it would be suitable as a workshop resource for students on low level Business Studies or Retail courses where book-keeping features on the syllabus. In addition, it has practical application for everyday life with its explicit instructions on PAYE and its explanation of a payslip.

By placing the material in the context of a simulated business, students can approach tasks as employees of that firm. Our employment trainee who tested the resource said it helped him to appreciate how a business has to run profitably and why activities such as stock-taking are so important.

The largish print of the text allows for easier reading and the index page clearly signposts the different units. These work either sequentially or as stand alone units. Students can work alone or with tutor support. Our student appreciated having the aims and objectives stated and the user friendly approach. He found it helpful having answers to the exercises at the back for easy reference.

The text is presented in manageable chunks but would be enlivened by the addition of pictures or photographs but of course these would have raised the cost of the materials. The print of the tables is rather small and their complexity requires a certain level of numeracy skills.

Neil has an AEB certificate of achievement in numeracy and found the level of the material about right for him. He has good reading skills which are essential if the file is to be used for self study as three or four pages of text need to be read before tackling a group of questions. Neil has gained confidence from using the resource, he mentioned an increase in VAT knowledge for example. He plans to file his notes as a source of useful information.

One small criticism is that the section on VAT needs updating to the new rate.

Nicola Goodbrand, ABE Co-ordinator
and Neil Scrouther, ET Trainee
North Yorkshire Education Authority

Us and the Kids

by Dorit Braun and others

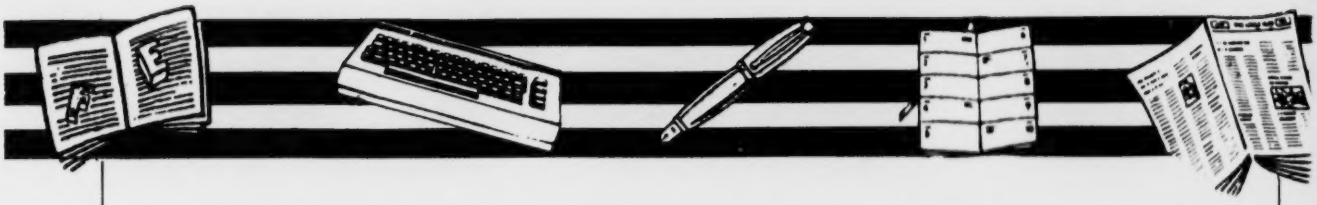
Published by Development Education Centre, 998 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LE

Price: £16.15

ISBN 0 948 383 183

This pack contains four clearly presented A4 booklets (with activities which can be photocopied for group use) and 24 attractive colour photographs depicting parents and children from a range of cultures in a variety of situations.

It aims to provide material for parents' groups to learn from each other and to support each other. Book one introduces the pack and the activities. It also has suggestions about planning, the role of leading the group and directs the reader to other useful resources. Book two outlines activities offering different ways of getting to know each other and exploring what is of concern to the group as a whole. Book three offers activities on the theme of being parents, what's involved and feeling good about it.



Book four contains activities about the world as young people experience it and the ways in which they learn. The pack received unqualified support from practitioners and parents who have seen it or used some of the activities in practitioner-run parents' groups in Leeds. In particular, the photographs stimulated different responses according to each participant's perceptions of the image.

This pack exemplified good practice in this area of work and I recommend it to practitioners leading parents' groups as well as parents running their own group.

Sheila Bower, ABE Worker
Leeds Education Authority

Self-Advocacy at Work

by EMFEC

Published by Print Partnership

Available from EMFEC, Robins Wood House, Robins Wood Road, Aspley, Nottingham NG8 3NH

Price: £35.00 + £5.00 p&p

ISBN 1 852 582 189

This very well presented pack has been developed for those people who have a training role with staff working mainly in the services sectors, e.g. Social Services, Health Education, Education, Voluntary Organisations. The aim of the pack is to raise awareness and develop an understanding of the meaning of Self-Advocacy in people who are involved in supporting others to represent themselves. An emphasis on the value of joint training between agencies professionals, service-users and service providers is made. This offers Self-Advocates the chance to speak, to be heard, to advance their own agenda and to challenge the 'unthinking exclusions of non-disabled people'.

The materials in the pack were developed by groups of service-users and providers in a variety of settings throughout the East Midlands. It consists of one handbook, which explains the structure of the pack, six modules, one audio cassette and some general information posters. Each of the 6 modules covers a particular area of Self-Advocacy, e.g. terminology, definitions, portfolio use, and includes numerous ideas for training events to meet the needs of people from a variety of backgrounds. A framework is provided for people to examine their own practice and discover ways of improving it. The ideas for activities are provided on A4 sheets which can be photocopied for training purposes. Also included are information sheets, a reading list and feedback from groups who have been involved in developing the pack. The six modules together form a comprehensive training programme but individual modules can be used to meet the needs of a particular group or to form part of a training event which has some other issue as its main focus. The tape offers more information and supports some of the activities found in the modules. Unfortunately, I found that the clarity of the voices and the volume carried on the tape which I have would suggest that it is used only by individuals or small groups.

Although the pack is expensive, it is an invaluable resource for any ABE group which has an active involvement in working with service-users, volunteers and other, either private or public, agencies.

Jackie Redfearn
Area Adult Basic Education Organiser
Bradford Education Authority

Look Here!

by Hugh and Margaret Brown

Published by Brown & Brown, Keepers Cottage, Westward Wigton, Cumbria CA7 8NQ

Price: £1.75 inc. p&p

ISBN 1 870 596 20X

Brown & Brown's modest publications always seem good value and the cards under consideration here cost a mere £1.75 a pack.

Look Here! is a collection of clearly printed signs and symbols in everyday use. (NO SMOKING, POISON, FIRE, EXIT, etc.). It also contains photographs of common situations accompanied by simple questions, such as, 'When is this supermarket open? 'If the switch is up, is it on or off?'

An optional extra with Look Here! is a set of bright flash cards which could broaden the use of the book. Some suggestions for card-games are also given.

Look Here! can be used for one-to-one work with students at basic level or worked through independently by a student who is able to read simple sentences. I have also found it a good source of 'signs and labels' for that element of the Wordpower Certificate. It provides an introduction to some culture-specific signs for ESOL students.

Marianne Puxley
Tutor, Learning Support
Oxfordshire Education Authority

Doing Our Bit
Doing Our Bit Exercises

by Hugh & Margaret Brown

Published by Brown & Brown, Keepers Cottage, Westward Wigton, Cumbria CA7 8NQ.

Price: £1.95 and 60p inc. p&p

ISBN 1 870 596 307
ISBN 1 870 596 2318

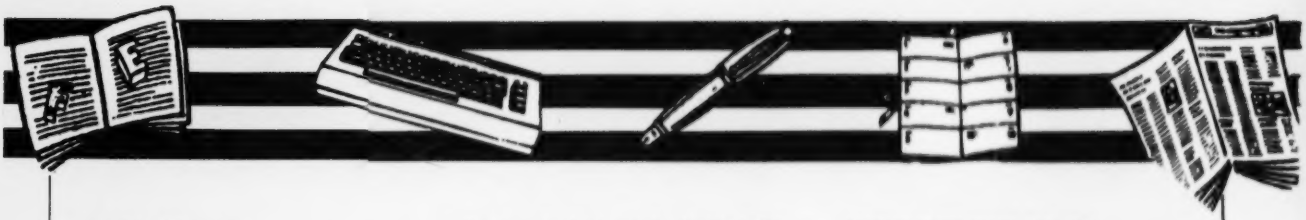
This small, inexpensive and very 'green' publication is likely to make a useful addition to many resource boxes.

The subject area is one that is currently receiving a lot of attention in the media and in schools. If nothing else, adult learners will find it a support when dealing with the homework questions to which many of us may find it difficult to respond.

The style is plain but unpatronising. The language around these topics would be difficult to simplify without insulting the learner and de-valuing the message.

The contents include information on acid rain, conservation, the greenhouse effect, the ozone layer and the tropical rain forest. There is a clear index, concise notes, facts and statistics on each topic, a photograph and on the opposite page suggestions on how we should respond to these issues.

This book could be used to support Wordpower as the content touches all of our lives. The information is presented in a variety of different formats which makes it appropriate to a number of units and elements. The writers also suggest opportunities for research, listing further reading and



useful addresses.

Although the cover is uninspiring, due, I suspect to 'green-ness' and the low price, it is clearly a useful and informative publication on a current theme. There is also an accompanying booklet of exercises – cloze, spelling, wordsearch, questions and answers, etc.

Jackie St. George
ABE Co-ordinator
Birmingham Education Authority

Everyday Spelling (second edition)

by Hugh and Margaret Brown

Published by Brown & Brown, Keepers Cottage, Westward Wigton, Cumbria CA7 8NQ

Price: £1.80 inc. p&p

ISBN 1 870 596 293

Everyday Spelling is a workbook designed to provide practice in the spelling of everyday words, alphabetical order, punctuation and a variety of words needed to write letters, postcards, notes, messages and cheques. There are also twelve practice pages providing work on form filling and the spelling of days, months, numbers and some common phrases. The form filling exercises are varied and graded according to difficulty. While the book itself is not photocopiable, there is a separate sheet of different cheques which can be copied.

The book begins with a very simple form filling exercise and an explanation of the look, say, cover, write and check method of learning to spell a word. It also indicates that this is one of many ways of learning to spell and each person should find the method that suits them. For a student to use the book alone they would have to be a reasonably good reader.

The difficulty with all spelling books is to ensure that the words learned are relevant to the student and this is also a problem with this book if worked through from beginning to end. On balance we felt this was a useful book that tutors would find a valuable addition to their resources. However, it does need to be used to reinforce what has already been taught as in several instances we felt more explanation of the task was required. Some exercises require knowledge that students may not possess; not everyone knows when the cricket season ends or is familiar with English proverbs.

In our opinion it is not a book a student should work through but rather one from which a tutor could recommend particular exercises or sections. Students who have seen the book have all thought it useful and commented particularly on the form filling, letter writing and message sections.

Barbara Whyley
Co-ordinator, Adult Learners Centre
Harrow Education Authority

Self Access Grammar – An English Language Resource Bank

by Erica Buckmaster

Published by National Extension College, 18 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge CB2 2HN

Price: £29.95 incl p&p

ISBN 0 860 828 476

'With all these other good grammar books available, why would you need this one?' asks Erica Buckmaster. Recognising that there is no one way to learn grammar, this language resource bank aims to make learning grammar part of an enjoyable learning process and to offer encouragement and guidance to teachers who may find it difficult to integrate grammar into a communicative teaching approach.

As with the author's previous Self Access Worksheets (Volumes 1 & 2, NEC. 1986), Self Access Grammar is not a definitive collection of worksheets, nor it is a course or a grammar refererice book. What it is, is a wonderful resource bank of worksheets, some of which can be used as they stand or as part of an integrated course, to help learners develop a basic awareness of grammar into which they can fit subsequent learning. It should also act as a stimulus for tutors as a source of ideas for worksheets either adapted from or added to those in this book.

Self Access Grammar is divided into 8 sections – the first three look at students setting a framework for a programme of study and regular review of progress; selecting grammar reference and practice books and how to use them constructively in conjunction with those worksheets; and a selection of charts to help students conceptualise both the forms and meanings of the structures involved.

Sections 4 to 8 look at specific aspects of grammar following the Self Access formula of worksheets and answer sheets on consecutive pages. To take just one example, in Section 6, the review of 'Passives', after earlier practice worksheets, has diagrammatic pictures of a town centre and asks what happened up to 1920, what has happened now, and what will happen by the year 2000. Why didn't I think of that? Which is the great thing about these worksheets...!

Although primarily designed for ESOL, as with the previous volumes, in Gloucestershire we have used these worksheets in self access workshops in open learning centres and in teacher-led groups for both ABE and ESOL groups and mixed pre-GCSE English programmes. You can literally do anything with them – to quote: 'the licence to photocopy includes the right to chop them up, glue them together and otherwise dispose of them!'. Next one please, Erica!

John Shorter
ESOL Tutor/ABE Open Learning Project Worker (GLOSCAT)
Gloucestershire Education Authority

We Just Came For Five Years

by The Caribbean Lunch Club 1991

Published by Age Concern, Thamesdown, 14 Milton Road, Swindon SN1 5JE

Price: £2.80 + 80p p&p

No ISBN

'This is a collection of 'writings about young life in Jamaica and adult life in England' written by members of a Caribbean Lunch Club. They wrote it because, as they talked about their memories, they realised a lot of children did not know about the customs and food of the West Indies. It is divided into three sections; personal stories (of life in Jamaica, first days in England, return trips to the

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Caribbean), recipes and 'ring play rhymes'. It is beautifully presented and laid out, with good-sized print and interspersed with photographs of the authors. This is the result of DTP by students at a local school – clearly a worthwhile collaborative venture.

The stories read very naturally and are full of bitter-sweet emotions. There are accounts of happy but hard working childhoods, the trauma of leaving the homeland and first experiences of a strange land. 'I had never seen snow before, I had only read about it but not seen it looking so white and pretty'. There is a stoicism in the face of racial discrimination; 'England is like a college, there is lots to learn about, good bad and indifferent.' I was interested that none of the accounts were in full Jamaican Creole, although the occasional Caribbean idiom remains. This, I presume, was a deliberate decision to make the book accessible to second generation readers.

I used the book in an ABE group of predominantly Jamaican students. We dipped into the stories and compared notes on similar experiences. One student 'sang' along with the rhymes. They made him sad, remembering the good times of his youth, whereas now he is only looking forward to death. The recipes cheered him up, as we talked about getting traditional ingredients. Next week he brought me his personal blend of curry powder and garlic to try!

This book is a useful resource for Afro-Caribbean students as a (fairly advanced) reader, a stimulus to writing, and above all as a talking point for memories, inter-generational differences and life in general.

Sue Partridge
ABE Co-ordinator
Sandwell Education Authority

Short Notices

Early Awakenings

by Geraldine McCoy

Produced by Belfast Centre for the Unemployed

Available from Adult Basic Education Unit, 45-47 Donegall St, Belfast BT1 2FG

Price: £2.00

No ISBN

Geraldine McCoy was born in Belfast and is a single parent with a six-year-old daughter. She chose to remain at home during her daughter's early years and, as a result of the isolation, began writing poetry as a means of self-expression. These gradually evolved as a social commentary on her own and many other women's position in society. The title of this book of poems originated, says the author, as the result of a long courtship and a short marriage.

Memories – in celebration of adult literacy

Produced by Islington Community Education Service

Available from Eden Grove Community Education Centre, Ring Cross School, Georges Road, N7.

Price: £4.80 + p&p

ISBN 0 951 787 713

In International Literacy Year students attending literacy classes all over the London Borough of Islington wrote about their memories of the past. This book is a collection of the pieces written which have been divided into chapters including such areas as: Childhood, School Days, Across the Seas, The Way it Was, Memories of Another Day.

Skillsheets – for Numeracy Training

by Linzi Henry

Available from Simply Fun, 8 Ashfurlong Close, Sheffield S17 3NN

Prices:
Fractions Decimals Percentages: 30 sheets £14
Measurement 1: 25 sheets £12
Measurement 2: 25 sheets £12
Time: 20 sheets £10

No ISBN

Skillsheets are a new resource for numeracy trainers. There are four Skillsheet books containing photocopiable worksheets suitable for basic numeracy training. Each book contains notes for tutors, answers and review sheets for assessment. The subjects covered include fractions, decimals, percentages, measurement, areas, weight, imperial and metric units and time.

Let's Read! How You Can Help Your Child

Produced by The London Borough of Camden

Available from The Librarian, Children, Youth and Schools, St Pancras Library, 100 Euston Road, London NW1 2AJ.

Price: £1.99 inc. p&p

ISBN 0 901 398 692

Let's Read! is a booklet containing straightforward advice on successful ways to enjoy books and stories with children. It is fully illustrated in colour with photographs shot in and around the streets, homes, schools and libraries of Camden's multi-racial community. The booklet demonstrates that children who are used to sharing the pleasures of stories with an adult have a head start with reading. Sponsored by Morley Books.

The ALBSU Newsletter is published four times a year, in November, February, May and July. Copies are available, free, to organisations and individuals. We aim to publish articles of interest to those teaching in adult literacy, second language and basic skills, those who are responsible for funding and organising the provision, and those who are generally interested in these important areas of work.

If you have ideas on topics which you would like to see covered, please contact the Editor, at ALBSU. Reviews of relevant publications are written for the newsletter by practitioners, and we are interested to receive publications which could be useful in basic education.

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, Kingsbourne House, 229/231 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA. Tel: 071-405 4017.

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ALBSU
The Basic Skills Unit

USING COMPUTERS WITH BILINGUAL STUDENTS

What contribution can computers make to work with bilingual adults? Glenys Smith, Development Officer at the Bristol Open Learning Centre, outlines practical approaches.

Progression

It is undoubtedly true that the demand for hands-on computer skills is not going to disappear as a passing fad. The experience of Open Learning centres and other groups who have had access to computers bears this out. Despite apprehension and reluctance on the part of some tutors, students *want* to acquire basic computer skills and enjoy using them to support language learning.

There are still, unfortunately, far too many situations where the access to computers or 'the computer' is inadequate, unnecessarily difficult or poorly technically supported. If *you* are going to invest time and effort into becoming familiar with using computers, exploring the range of software available and developing support materials for use in the classroom, you need to be guaranteed available machines, programs which work and at least readable manuals on hand to support your endeavours. There also needs to be some sort of system for recording problems and dealing with these in a reasonably short space of time.

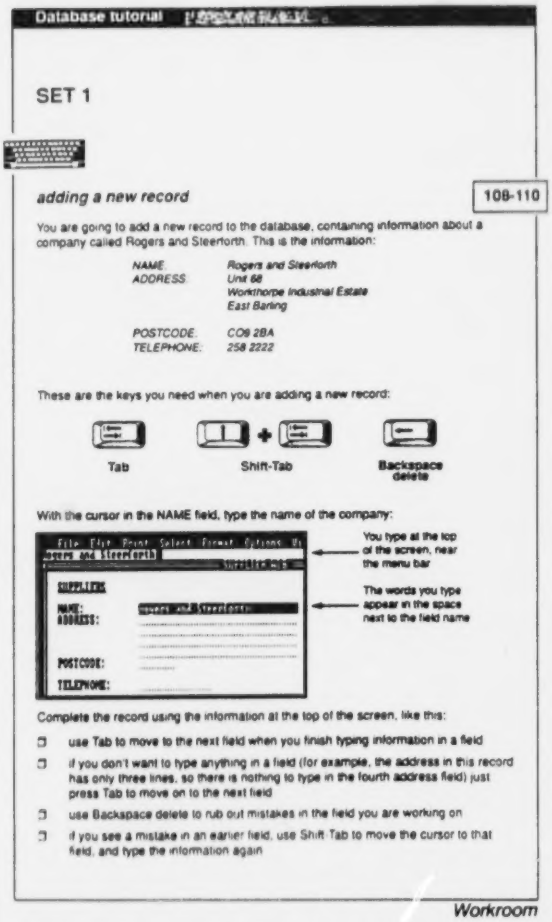
For those of you still reading . . . what follows is a variety of ideas for using computers to support your teaching.

The Vocational Link

Experience at the Open Learning Centre in Bristol has shown that many students who would otherwise not present for help with language or communication skills, are attracted by the possibility of learning computer skills. Language and literacy difficulties will then often emerge and can be worked on within this framework.

Thus courses which are advertised as some form of introduction to IT can provide an excellent vehicle for language and literacy programmes. These may involve accreditation, such as the RSA CLAIT certificate or the AEB certificate in Basic Computer Awareness, or may comprise your own structured introduction to the use of computers for work or study.

The new NEC/NFER pack, Workroom, written by Janet Leonard provides a good example of one such programme. The computer based materials, which give an introduction to using wordprocessing database and spreadsheets in an office, are supported by paper based learning and practice exercises. These range from alphabetical order, through telephone skills, to report writing.


Database tutorial
SET 1
adding a new record
108-110
You are going to add a new record to the database, containing information about a company called Rogers and Steerforth. This is the information:
NAME: Rogers and Steerforth
ADDRESS: Unit 68
Workthorpe Industrial Estate
East Barling
POSTCODE: CO9 2BA
TELEPHONE: 258 2222
These are the keys you need when you are adding a new record:
Tab
Shift-Tab
Backspace
delete
With the cursor in the NAME field, type the name of the company:
You type at the top of the screen, near the menu bar
The words you type appear in the space next to the field name
SUPPLIERS
NAME:
ADDRESS:
POSTCODE:
TELEPHONE:
Complete the record using the information at the top of the screen, like this:
use Tab to move to the next field when you finish typing information in a field
if you don't want to type anything in a field (for example, the address in this record has only three lines, so there is nothing to type in the fourth address field) just press Tab to move on to the next field
use Backspace delete to rub out mistakes in the field you are working on
if you see a mistake in an earlier field, use Shift Tab to move the cursor to that field, and type the information again

Workroom

Alternatively you could devise your own course, or work with a computing tutor, to provide a learning opportunity where language support is built in by design.

A range of programs, with support materials and exercises produced by CIA Training, provide opportunities to learn about a variety of applications at work. For example one database program simulates work in an Estate Agents, while another gives practice with using an electronic office diary. Programs like these could provide a useful basis for your own course.

If you *are* thinking of developing this option you will need to ensure that not only your language support exercises, but also the

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computer materials, are appropriate for bilingual learners. In other words you need to apply the same principles as in other provision, namely:

- Build on students' existing skills by utilising their community languages wherever possible.
- Basic processes and procedures for using computers could be translated and displayed as wall charts.
- Tapes in main languages could be used to introduce new topics and modules.
- Names, examples and applications cited should reflect a diversity of cultural interests and concerns.

New vocabulary may not translate directly so students will need a system for recording and learning this.

Computer Vocabulary List :

New Word	What it sounds like	What it means
PROGRAM		
PERIPHERAL		
PRINTER		

These can be photocopied onto card and built up into a vocabulary file to be made available to other students.

Finally, if students are attending such provision alongside more traditional ESOL, try and use this experience to reinforce any work towards accreditation. You might, for instance, encourage students to reflect on their work with computers in terms of the RSA profile sentences. This will enable you and the students to identify where particular help is needed and should also provide opportunities for evidencing the various objectives. For example:

- Asking for help (02)
- Explaining that a procedure hasn't worked (010)
- Following instructions on a worksheet (R6)
- Writing letters for Wordprocessing practice (W7, W8)

Supporting Language Provision

Independent of any expressed desire to learn IT skills for work, computers can be used with great effect to supplement and support more traditional teaching methods.

ESOL students will usually write in their first language using a different script. Learning to write in English thus involves the mechanical skills of handwriting as well as the cognitive skills involved in expression through a new language. Using a computer allows these two skills to be separated. By using the keyboard, the student can focus on the latter and create a piece of work which is immediately clear and legible. In addition, the ability to manipulate blocks of text on screen means that the skills of layout and presentation can also be dealt with separately.

Educational Programs

As tutors, we all look for materials which are relevant and usable by our students with minimal adaptation. Inevitably such packs are few and far between and we end up cutting, sticking and inserting our own ideas and content.

Such adaptation is just not possible with many computer programs which are advertised as developing language and communication skills. This is because to 'cut and stick' we would also need to become computer programmers! However, there are programs which have an authoring facility. This means that you are given model exercises but it is also possible to add your own, customised to *your* students' needs. Context, the spelling program which was developed to support the 'Spelling It Out' series on TV is one example of this.

Another difficulty with language programs is that most have been developed for the EFL market and are, therefore, often inappropriate and/or expensive.

However, there will be educational programs which you can use such as Newtown produced by ILECC for ALBSU. This is a simulation of someone moving to a new town and having to cope with all the attendant problems. It lends itself to the development of related oral and paper based work which could focus on particular language issues. The new Basic Skills Software Guide, available from ALBSU, provides comprehensive and up to date information on available software for ABE and ESOL. Details of all the programs mentioned in this article can be found in it.

There are other programs, not intended primarily as teaching tools but as databanks of information, which can also prove useful. Healthdata is one such program containing masses of health related material including sources of help and further information. The pack Health Matters, available from ILECC, was developed to exploit this source for communication skills practice. It is aimed at ABE rather than ESOL students but it demonstrates the way such sources can be utilised and linked into an accreditation scheme – in this case Wordpower.

If you have the necessary hardware available, some CD ROM materials provide interesting and extensive databanks around which valuable materials could be developed. Most of this is, at present, aimed at schools but Cambridge Training and Development have produced a literacy disc for adults and are currently working on one for numeracy. It is intended that material in the latter will be presented in a choice of Community languages.

Data Free Programs

Most of the potential for language work, however, still lies with the data free or generic programs. Wordprocessing, database and spreadsheet programs are now available in varying degrees of sophistication and complexity, (see software guide). All can be used to produce a range of customised materials at a variety of levels.

The use of wordprocessing generally has been well documented in this respect (1) and the pack Wordprocessing for Literacy Skills, available for various programs, offers a model of how to apply these ideas.

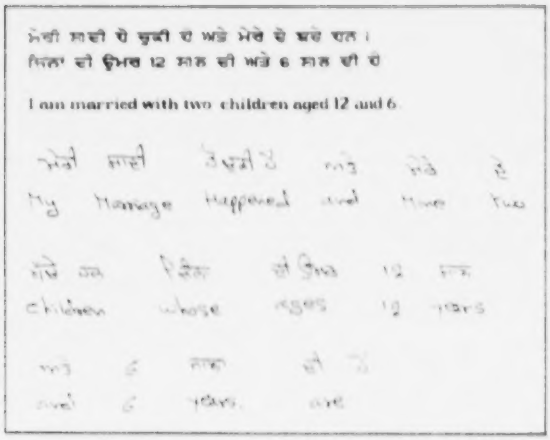
In the limited space remaining some ideas to extend this kind of work will be explored.

Exploiting the student's languages

Some wordprocessing programs have the extra facility of producing community languages, Allwrite and Multilingual Scholar, for IBM and Nimbus machines, and Advanced Folio, for the BBC, are examples of these.

In the case of Allwrite, a keyboard representing the alternative language is made available on screen allowing the student to wordprocess in her own language using the mouse. Thus computer skills can be accessed in a familiar language so simplifying the number of skills to be juggled with at any one stage of the learning process.

Students may also want to use this facility to 'rehearse' an account or report to be written. This could then be used to explore the way her language is organised compared to English structures. With the help of your students you could be well on the way to producing some valuable bilingual worksheets!



It's also worth having such programs so that bilingual students, too, can take advantage of the technology to write a letter home to family or friends, or word process notes explaining some teaching point.

Concept Keyboards

The use of a concept keyboard further extends the possibility for utilising a student's own language.

A concept keyboard is a flat A4 or A3 sized pad which plugs into the computer. It can be used instead of, or as well as a conventional keyboard.

Each square, or combination of squares, will produce a message on the screen when pressed. This might consist of letters, words, phrases or sentences. A paper overlay sits on top of the pad and may have pictures, words, or a combination of both on it. This is what the student sees and presses. So for example, the student may see a picture of various tools used in a workshop and pressing any one of these could produce its name on screen.

There are few commercially produced concept keyboard materials for adults and non aimed specifically at ESOL students. Fortunately, it is surprisingly easy to prepare your own. The programs which support the use of a concept keyboard provide on screen step by step instructions for creating overlay files. This means that you can decide which messages come up on screen when different parts of the concept keyboard are pressed, linked to whatever overlay you design.

An ESOL tutor in Bristol has produced a set of overlays aimed at teaching bilingual students a phonic approach as one strategy in learning to read English. A tape accompanying the pack gives instructions in English and Urdu. Each overlay presents a series of pictures each representing a one syllable word. The student is asked to listen to the first word and then press the corresponding picture. The word is displayed on the screen. The student is then asked to press the word's constituent sounds chosen from English letter sounds displayed along the top of the overlay in Urdu characters. The letters appear next to the original word on the screen for self checking. This pack was produced using a program called Prompt/Writer.

Another program, Touch Explorer Plus, allows overlays to be linked together and accessed via a series of up to six levels marked on the overlay. This possibility lends itself to a range of uses where you might want the student to explore some material in a variety of ways, for example, teaching verb tenses.

A common overlay can be used to produce sentences where the verb tense changes as different level squares are pressed. These squares appear on the overlay marked *now*, *everyday*, *yesterday* and *tomorrow*.

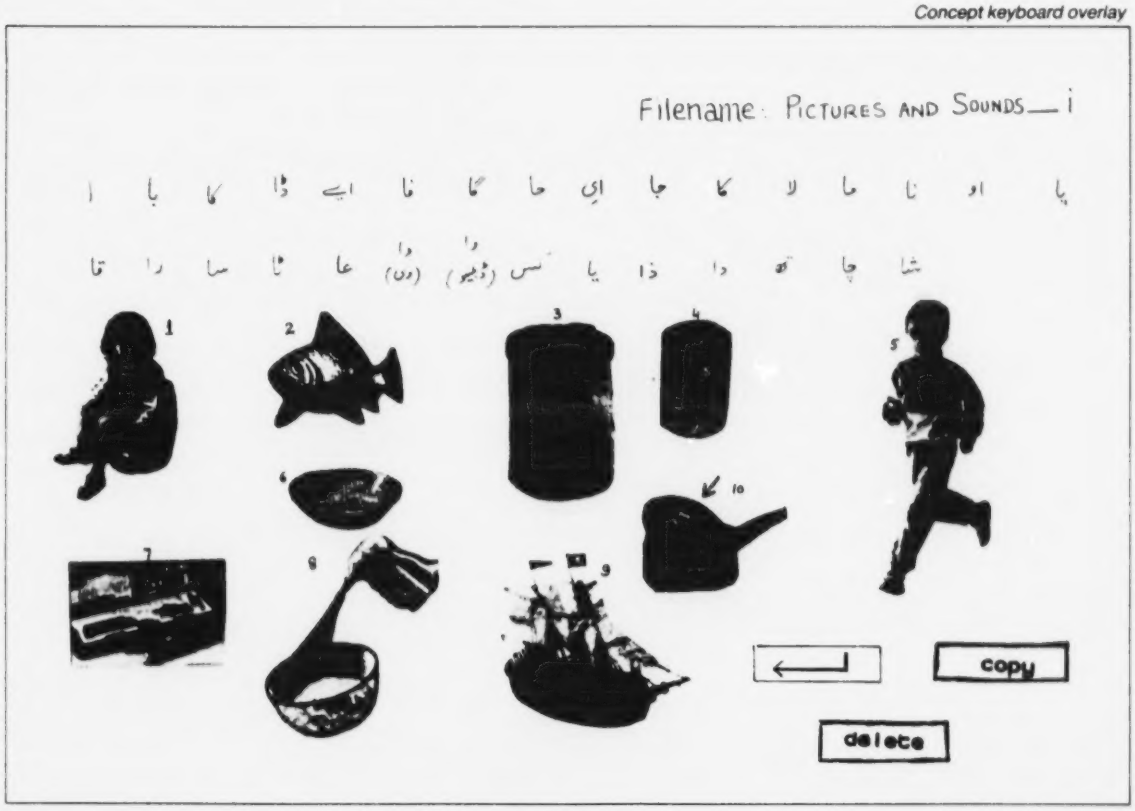
In other words, if the square marked *everyday* has been pressed, pressing pictures 1 and 2 will produce, on screen, the sentence:

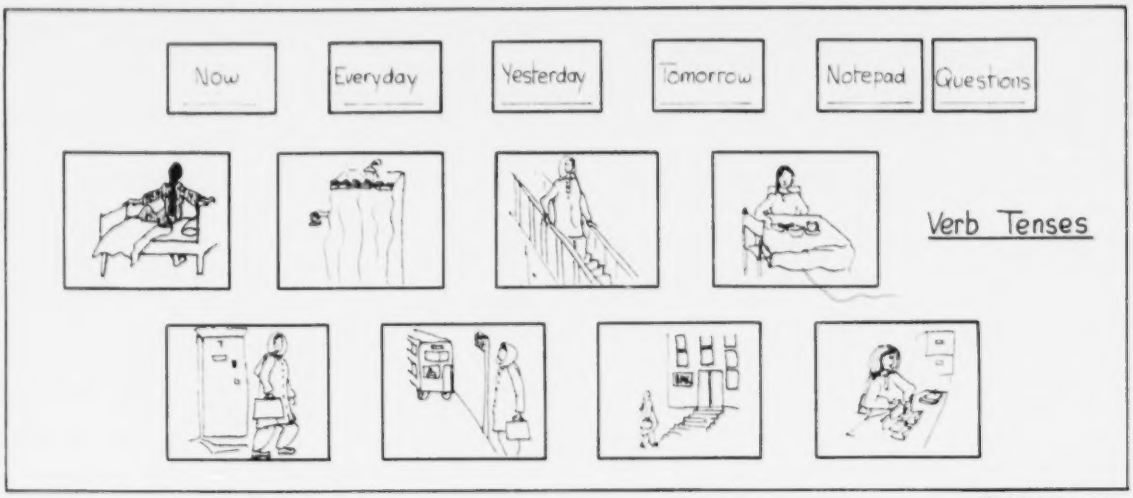
'she *gets* up and *has* a shower.'

When *yesterday* is pressed first, pressing the same two pictures will produce the sentence:

'she *got* up and *had* a shower.'

Concept keyboard overlay





Verb tense overlay

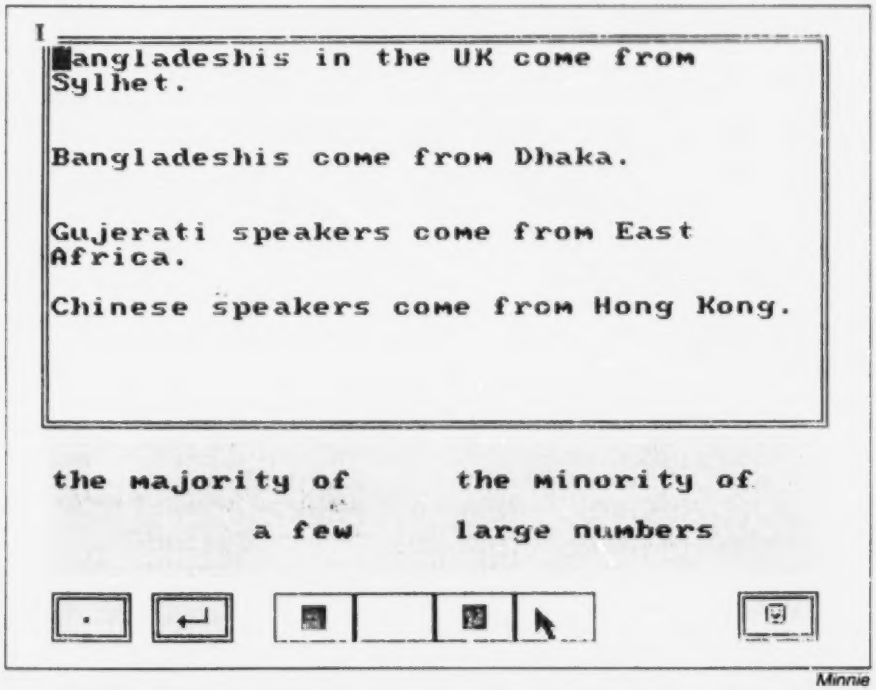
The possibilities are endless and the results well worth the investment of time needed to learn the necessary skills. Prompt/Writer and Touch Explorer Plus are available for BBC and Nimbus machines.

Minnie, available for Nimbus, is a wordprocessing program with an extra facility rather like having a concept keyboard on the screen, which is split into two areas. The larger part is available for wordprocessing in the usual way but the lower area can be used to display letters, words, sentences, etc., pre-prepared by you. In the example shown, a student has to select words from the lower screen and decide where they should be inserted into the text. Four coloured boxes, at the very bottom of the screen, can each give access to a different store of words, phrases, etc. These then become options in the lower area when the box is selected with the mouse.

The student reads the text and the words. She uses the mouse to place the cursor where she wants to insert a word. Clicking on the chosen word in the lower area results in it being copied into the sentence. If she selects the next coloured box she will be offered an alternative set of words which she could insert into the sentence.

Again the possible applications of this program are numerous. You could use it for spelling, word order, sequencing or prediction. You have the choice of what appears on screen. Instructions can be given to the student orally, on paper worksheets, on tape in a community language or included on screen at the beginning of the exercise.

This insert has explored just a few ideas for using computers with bilingual adults. If it has whetted your appetite and aroused your curiosity then it has succeeded. The best use of computers will be made when you can find the time to become familiar with a couple of programs so that you and your students can start experimenting with them in the classroom.


Bangladeshis in the UK come from Sylhet.
Bangladeshis come from Dhaka.
Gujerati speakers come from East Africa.
Chinese speakers come from Hong Kong.
the majority of
the minority of
a few
large numbers

Minnie

SUMMER
1992

No 46

NEWSLETTER

ALBSU

The Basic Skills Unit

Photo: Pauline Nasmith

Children and parents enjoy reading (see page 10).

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BASIC SKILLS -WHAT CHANGES?

Hardly anyone can fail to realise that we are in a period of change in basic skills work. Much of the change which will take place over the next few years stems from the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 which was passed just before the General Election took place in May. It's not yet entirely clear how much change there will be, particularly as the Further Education Funding Councils (FEFCs) in England and in Wales are only very recently established and basic skills is unlikely to be the first item on the agenda.

It's important to remember that change has been a continuous feature of basic skills in the last 10-15 years and that change has often meant new development opportunities as well as a chance to strengthen and improve the quality of what we do. Much of the change because of the Act is likely to be focused on the organisation, management and funding of basic skills work and, whilst these will be important, what goes on between teachers and studentss in groups, classes, homes, open learning centres, colleges, Youth Training (YT) and Employment Training (ET) schemes and a host of other learning situations is what is really important. Changes in management, organisation and funding will only be effective if they allow teaching to be better or extend the scale of the opportunities available for people to improve essential skills.

CHANGES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Changes have taken place in teaching and learning over the last few years of course and what is provided today is often rather different from what was provided 10 or 15 years ago. We are about to publish an entirely new edition of *'An Introduction to Literacy Teaching'*, the standard handbook for new teachers and tutors and the differences between the new and old edition illustrate the differences between 1992 and 1979 when it was first published.

For instance, the original edition is pretty 'light' on assessment and planning, hardly mentions accreditation or competences and doesn't mention open learning at all. There are only three pages on 'Evaluation and Record Keeping' near the end of the handbook and just over two pages of 'Some Useful Books'. All of this is understandable, perhaps. At the time there was still considerable anxiety about keeping away from some of the approaches and practices which had been typical of far too much literacy work in the early 1970s – a reliance on reading schemes designed for young children or adolescents, inappropriate testing and a bias towards phonically based approaches and rote learning over developing meaning and understanding.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a bit of a 'swing back' to some of these discredited practices in the school system, as though somehow approaches which were not very effective in the past – approaches which failed many of the students we work with – will magically work in the 1990s. It would be nice if it was that simple!

However, before we receive letters from people who believe that a return to teaching exclusively through phonics works for everyone, we should add that, of course, phonics has a place in helping adults to improve reading skills; the strength of adult literacy has been the variety of approaches most teachers and tutors have available and the recognition that a single approach won't work with everyone.

Rejection of out dated and inappropriate approaches doesn't mean that proper assessment is not important or that effective planning is not essential. It's dificult to teach effectively unless you know something about the strengths of a student – what they know and can do already – as well as something about the skills, knowledge and competences they want help to improve. Planning is also essential if students are to have a clear idea of what you plan to do together and if they are to have a major involvement in lessons which take place.

It's particularly important that teachers and students understand the skills being developed through particular activities, rather than taking for granted that the link is clear. Whilst assessing progress can be time consuming and difficult, assessment is part of the process of teaching and learning and students have a right to know, fairly objectively, how they are getting on. Of course, it has to be a sensitive and participatory process and it can sometimes be painful for all concerned but it can't be replaced by 'fobbing students off' with a cursory 'it's going OK'.

QUALITY STANDARDS

We have just published *'ALBSU's Quality Standards for Basic Skills Programmes'* (see centre pages) which set out what we believe every basic skills student and trainee

should be entitled to when they join a programme. These are minimum standards and we know that some basic skills programmes will provide far more; more worringly some programmes are far away from being able to provide even these modest entitlements. Because the Quality Standards are essentially about entitlements for the student or trainee, rather than about administrative matters, the right to initial assessment, a learning plan, assessment of progress, adequate learning material, access to accreditation and progression, etc, are enshrined in the Standards. The Quality Standards in full are that every person taking part in a basic skills programme should be entitled to:

1. A confidential, personal interview before beginning tuition.
2. A learning opportunity within easy reach of home.
3. At least four hours direct tuition a week.
4. An appropriate teacher/student ratio in a learning group.
5. Respect for gender and cultural identity.
6. A negotiated 'learning plan'.
7. Regular assessment of progress.
8. Access to progression, including advice and guidance.
9. Access to accreditation.
10. Teaching by staff trained to nationally recognised standards.
11. Access to suitable learning material.
12. Teaching which takes account of the context for learning.

Full details of the Quality Standards are set out in a free publication available from ALBSU so phone us for a copy if you want to find out more.

WHAT NEVER CHANGES?

By now you might be wondering what will remain in the new version of *'An Introduction to Literacy Teaching'* from the previous version or if everything will be entirely different. Much will remain because a lot of the original edition reflects the enduring and unchanged strengths of literacy work, and of basic skills provision. The emphasis on meeting student needs rather than on imposing a teacher determined curriculum and programme will remain, as will the importance given to negotiation, participation and literacy as an active, rather than a passive, process. The importance of working from strengths and recognising achievement will still be there, as will the key task of building confidence not just competence. There will also be a substantial exploration of different approaches to teaching reading and writing because, as was said earlier, good teachers understand that different approaches work better at different times and that some approaches work more effectively with some people than with others.

THE PLACE OF BASIC SKILLS

At the beginning of this article, we mentioned the changes in the administration, management and funding of basic skills provision which are likely to take place over the next few years, largely because of the Further and Higher Education Act. One of the strengths of ALBSU has been our independence. That doesn't mean that everyone has always agreed with everything we have ever done or said. It does mean, however, that we have been able to take an independent view about basic skills.

We have been fortunate that successive government ministers from both the Education Department and the Welsh Office have supported our efforts and that the civil servants we have dealt with have been encouraging and helpful. We value our independence and it's particularly important at a time of change. It allows us to advocate developments and take a critical view, whilst helping and supporting LEAs, colleges, voluntary organisations and a range of other bodies to improve and develop their provision. Our voice is a voice for basic skills – wherever they are being learnt, improved and taught in England and Wales, whatever the context.

We don't believe that basic skills should be seen as the preserve of a particular sector, such as adult or futher education; rather it should be a central part of the concern of a host of agencies including social services, health, housing, employment, economic development and regeneration and voluntary bodies concerned with disadvantaged groups and individuals in our society. To limit basic skills to one sector or service area is to lessen its importance and reduce its influence. This cross sector role will be important in the next few years as we strive to develop a service that more adequately meets the needs of a significant and important percentage of the population which has benefited little from their own investment in education and training and remain undereducated and undervalued.

The Funding Councils in England and Wales will play an important part in the further education sector in the next few years and we will do all we can to help them develop basic skills provision. However, it's important to remember other 'players' will still be involved including Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), the Home Office (for ESOL and work in prisons), the Department of the Environment (through various regeneration programmes, such as 'City Challenge') employers and private trusts, as well as the European Community. Wide ranging and cross sector basic skills will involve a range of funders and providers and, whilst further and adult education will continue to be important, neither will be the exclusive provider.

That said there is a lot of important business ahead and a number of key decisions to be taken. For instance, before anyone can decide whether basic skills provision is adequate – a key requirement of the Act – something will have to be done to define basic skills and to determine the parameters of provision. Up to now this has been very much a local matter and the terms used are different in different places and mean different things. The level of funding, and the basis for funding, will need to be considered, as will how basic skills work is assessed and evaluated.

DEFINING BASIC SKILLS

Although there is not space in this article to deal with all of these areas of basic skills, it's worth saying something about our definition. We recognise that, at present, different terms are used to describe effectively the same educational activities. In some places 'adult basic education' (ABE) is used to describe what we call 'basic skills' (the term in our remit) and in others 'second chance', 'special provision' and 'essential adult learning' are used. Some providers use specific terms, such as 'adult literacy', 'numeracy' or 'basic maths', 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' (ESOL) or 'English as a Second Language' (ESL) for the different aspects of what we use the collective term 'basic skills' to describe.

Definitions also vary but, by basic skills, we mean:

'the ability to read, write, and speak in English and use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general.'

In Wales, our definition includes the ability to read and write in Welsh for people whose first language or mother tongue is Welsh. However, in general the definition of basic skills we use does not include necessarily wider provision for adults with special needs, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or general access and return to study courses. We'll be considering the parameters of basic skills and considering future funding and evaluation in the next Newsletter. ■

C.A.P.E.R.

Children and Parents Enjoy Reading

Christine Kemp and Pauline Neasmith, part-time Organisers of ABE at Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology, describe an outreach project working with parents: not all strictly according to plan, but with undoubted results.

Project aims

Aim

- to explore with an identified school the possibilities of a support system for parents.

Objectives

- to encourage parents to become active partners with their children in learning
- through a supported partnership facilitate the process whereby parents can identify their own educational needs and become empowered by this.

Location

The school is situated in a densely populated area approximately two miles from the town centre, with a large proportion of single parents. There are two other infant schools in the immediate area but this one had been identified, through outreach work, as one having considerable difficulties involving any parents with school activities.

Initial discussions

The Headmistress of the school expressed interest in our aims as she was very keen to involve parents with their children's activities and learning. In particular the whole area of the children's lack of language development was identified as one of the barriers to reading. She was eager too for parents to have opportunities for self development. Subsequent discussions with the staff gave support to a scheme to be called CAPER – Children and Parents Enjoy Reading. This scheme was initially to provide time equally divided between parents and parents and children together. The most appropriate time to 'catch' parents seemed to be immediately after they had brought their children to school. Funding allowed for 9 x 2 hour sessions.

Parent group

It was decided to target the two reception classes and so we used badges, balloons and stickers as pre-project publicity. Parents were invited to attend informal coffee sessions held in the school for information exchange about the aims of the project and just as importantly, put names to faces.

Resources

It was important for the scheme to have attractive books which could be made available for the children to use during the group and at home with their parents. Discussions with the library service (Share-a-Book) allow 'CAPER' the use of a collection of new books rotated each term with particular emphasis on those without words to stimulate discussion and language.

Photo: Pauline Neasmith

'Although the mobile library comes to school it's not the same, as CAPER is much more relaxed and they can really choose.'

Stage 1 – *Starting Points*

At the outset we stressed that one of the objectives of CAPER was for children to *enjoy* books and *not* to get them reading before they were truly ready.

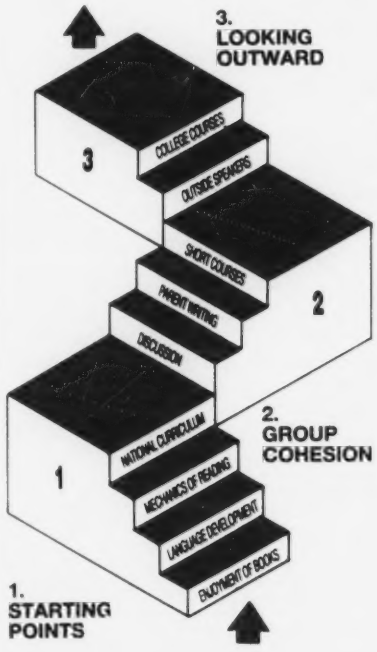
In the early days attendance varied enormously and consequently we found ourselves repeating parts of sessions for those parents who missed them.

The format of the meetings evolved with negotiation but began to have a structure of games, exercises, role play, etc, all to encourage the parents to appreciate language and how children learn to read. Discussions also took place about the parents' attitudes towards reading and the barriers they might have experienced themselves.

'I hated reading so much, I wanted the kids to enjoy it'.

CAPER progressed, somewhat erratically, with parents questioning how people actually learn to read. Subsequently concerns emerged about the school's existing method of teaching the alphabet and phonics, 'Letterland'. It became evident that they had no real knowledge of how this system worked and were therefore unable to help their children, even holding back from trying for fear of making mistakes.

This period also coincided with the introduction of the National Curriculum and the parents formulated a long list of questions relating to their anxieties about the new procedures, particularly the jargon associated with SAT's.



The joint part of each session (parents and children) was attended enthusiastically by the children – all wanting to get stickers and change their books.

> *'It's been important to the children – as they can choose their own books – if a teacher gives it to them it's a* ***reading*** *book and they* ***have*** *to read it.'*

It was evident how much they enjoyed and valued the unique experience of having their parents in school and their undivided attention when talking about their stories.

> *'He feels special having extra time with me and being able to see a wider variety of books which we couldn't afford to buy.'*

At the end of the initial pilot period (one school term) additional funding was found as the Headmistress reported positively on the children's and parents' response.

Stage II – *Group cohesion*

Gradually as we gained the group's trust it became apparent that needs were changing and evident that parents regarded time for themselves as increasingly important. They wanted time to discuss their own concerns and problems relating to being parents. It therefore became critical for us to clarify our position in relation to them and the school, i.e. we could not become 'go-betweens' for personal complaints.

The session began to take a more open form with discussion accompanied by writing and tapes for transcript.

> *'We talk about so many different things and I have found I can write about some of them'.*

Short courses like 'Make Yourself Heard' (Assertiveness) and 'How We Appear' (Women's image) were delivered whilst the core of the group was becoming more consistent. The attendance of the children however grew 'like Topsy' as friends were dragged along and consequently we were bursting at the seams.

Stage III – *Looking outwards*

This period saw a solid group established that decided there was a need for specific information from outside speakers and experts.

> *'The courses and outside speakers have been important – I would never go out to see these people.'*

The programme has covered areas like – Children's behavioural problems, Women's Health, Money Advice and Careers' guidance from the college. Discussion and writing followed these sessions. In particular the talk from the Guidance Service elicited a general concern about computers with implications for future employment and the ability to help their own children. Consequently an eight hour course in college was organised with crèche facilities provided. We were really encouraged that all the group attended on a regular basis:

> *'When the opportunity came to do a short course on computers, all the members of the CAPER group were very keen to find out something new. The tutors made everyone relaxed and confident to learn and we felt we didn't have to compete. Some of us were quicker than others but we were allowed to go at our own pace'.*

Problems encountered

School: practical problems such as the context in which the group can be held is a priority. Most schools are overcrowded and space is at a premium and thus, whilst they might want to encourage parental participation it can often mean a group such as CAPER being relegated to a staff room with its accompanying restrictions. A clearly identified area that can be used primarily by parents is something our group has identified as a real necessity.

Whilst we have appreciated the co-operation of the school we have also been empathetic to the increasing demands placed on teachers and so there have been occasions when it has felt as if CAPER was in interruption to the school day. These constraints have also meant opportunities have been missed for communication and feedback from staff.

Crèche facilities were essential if parents were to really benefit from the group objectives. Problems arose when siblings refused to stay or lack of numbers led to an under utilised resource. Arranging a crèche is never as simple or straightforward as it might appear but it was a priority because the parents needed time alone.

The erratic attendance of parents also made any continuity difficult in the group, this has rationalised short courses into weekly modules. The need for two working parents has become an economic reality and the idea of allowing time for oneself now the children are in school a growing luxury.

Keeping the group focused proved difficult as the sessions could easily develop into gossip and chat. In fact CAPER has become known by the group as CAPERS – Children and Parents Enjoy Reading and Sex! But as the women have grown in confidence and responsibility they have been able to keep themselves in check whilst still allowing personal time when it is evidently needed.

Conclusion

It is always easy to look back at a project from a safe distance and to get frustrated at apparent lack of forethought and vision. However when involved nothing is as clearly defined as later analysis might indicate. The process of writing this has clarified for us the stages the group has progressed through and the level of success actually achieved. Outreach of this nature is characteristically unpredictable, perhaps because it takes place in the midst of people's lives. If, like one 'CAPER' member, you leave your cramped, damp flat in the morning and you're experiencing problems with the council that is part of the baggage you present in the session. Whereas in college based groups students physically put distance between themselves and their problems for an allotted period of time and can therefore focus more easily on the subject.

At the end of it all how do you measure success?

Aims and objectives we feel have been clearly met as the school now has a cohesive group of women who regularly attend and have taken an active role in their children's education.

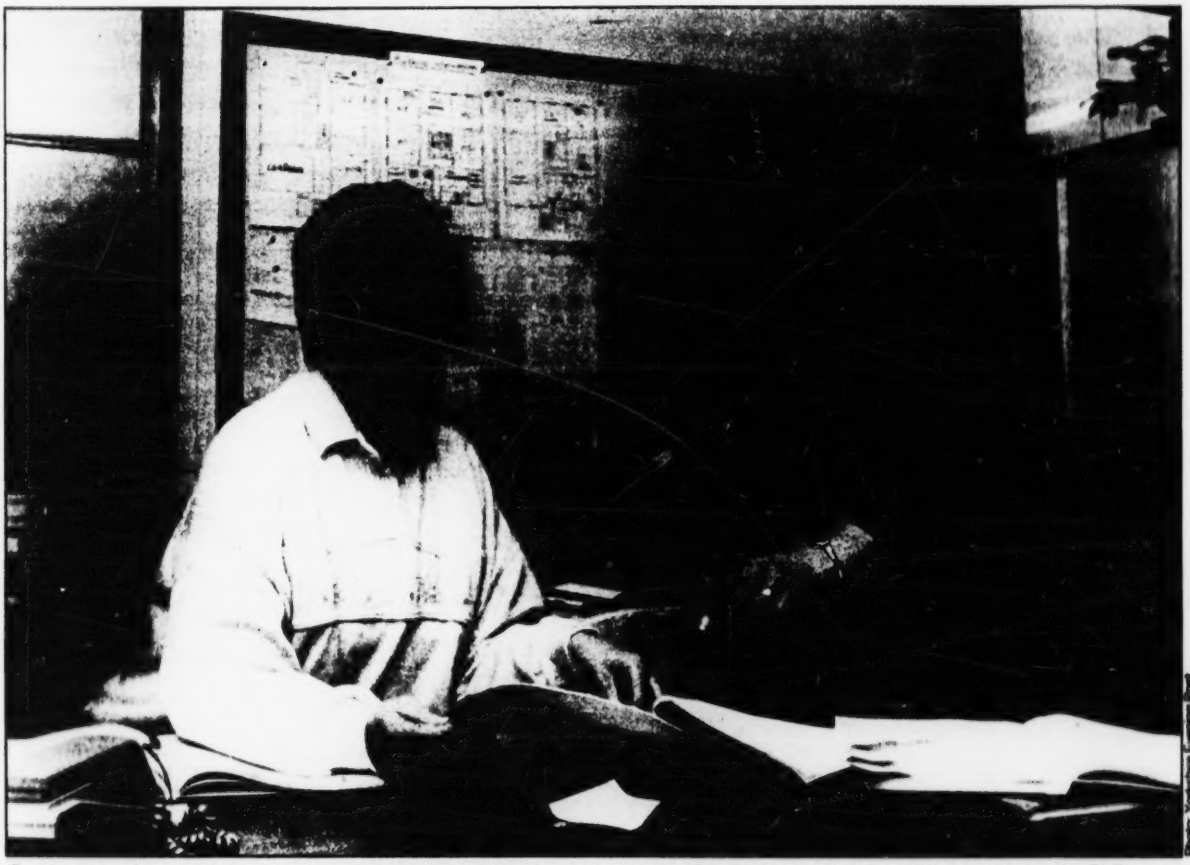
> *'I normally lose interest in things very quickly but I've kept on coming to this'.*
>
> *'I've really gained in confidence and it's got Kelly interested in reading and books – it's brought her on a lot'.*

One member enrolled on a Return to Learn course in college and the rest have expressed real interest in learning in other areas.

Of equal importance they now know and trust us as representatives of the college and hopefully a point of contact for the future. Conventional ABE students have not come to us directly from the group but because of our presence in the school and word of mouth, a number of people with literacy and numeracy needs now attend ABE college based groups.

Perhaps this notion of success might appear to the objective outsider as minimal but for these women at this time it has meant a growth in individual awareness and a chance to see the potential for change in their lives. Providers have to acknowledge that outreach work is lengthy, erratic and cannot always be measurable by conventional college standards.

So what for the future – they're still talking about it, now they've started, we can't shut them up! ■



Positive examples were featured in the series: Doreen Varley returned to training after illness, and became clerical assistant at the OLC.

LEEDS INTO WORK

Basic Education staff in Leeds have recently had the opportunity of working with a local newspaper to produce a distance learning series based on job search. It has provided an excellent opportunity to promote work being done in the City on basic communication skills for adults in education and training. Jill Kibble, the Open Learning Centre Co-ordinator, describes what has proved to be a productive partnership.

INTO WORK is a project that arose from discussions with the Yorkshire Evening Post (YEP) on using newspapers in basic skills.

At a time of particularly bleak unemployment statistics in Leeds the project has centred on a highly successful serialisation of information exercises and case studies on the theme of job search. The serialisation was supported by:

- follow up workshops on job search skills
- an information helpline to refer enquiries to Adult Basic Education (ABE) provision in their locality
- a free letter writing for jobs pack produced by the Open Learning Centre
- provision of complimentary copies of the YEP to ABE groups in the City for the duration of the project.

Four ABE workers with different areas of specialism formed the steering group for the project and liaised with the news editor and a YEP staff reporter to produce the six week serialisation.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the INTO WORK project were:

- to raise awareness of, and promote, basic communication skills education for adults provided by local authority Further Education (Community) and the integrated Youth and Adult Training programme
- to promote the use of newspapers as an appropriate adult learning resource in education and training and as a job seeking resource
- to develop student confidence in using newspapers

- to promote equality of opportunity in job seeking through positive role models
- to assist a wider public obtain basic job seeking through a widely available medium utilising a programme of distance learning, workshop sessions and open learning materials
- to attract traditional non-participants into education or training.

Content

Each weekly 'episode' consisted of a personal interest story, an action section with referral numbers for education, training or job search skills and information on an aspect of job finding:

- looking at your skills and where to look for work
- writing a C.V.
- letters of application
- telephoning for jobs and education and training for work (linking with Adult Learners Week)
- interview skills
- aptitude tests.

For the newspaper it was necessary to make the series as lightweight as possible whilst keeping the information accurate and relevant to our target group of readers.

Response

With a circulation of 130,900 and an estimated readership of 343,000 the YEP is an excellent vehicle for distance learning. We received nearly 300 requests for our letter writing pack, a demand which far outstripped our expectations, and in the region of 100 calls were taken at the referral points and gave us an indication of the wide readership of the series and the relevance of the topic.

Through the provision of free newspapers and letter writing packs to ABE Centres in Leeds we potentially reached a further 1,500 students in community education alone. Job Centres throughout the region have used the series and requested letter writing packs so here again the series is potentially reaching a very large client group.

INTO WORK Open Learning Resource Pack

A major outcome of the project was the YEP's offer to jointly produce an INTO WORK job search pack for ABE/ESOL students. The pack will be based on the series with a considerable extension of material. The project team is currently working on this publication with the newspaper and it is hoped that this will be ready for distribution over the summer.

Linked Workshops

Follow up workshops linking with the newspaper serialisation were held at the Open Learning Centre in South Leeds, in North West and East Leeds and Morley.

Interview skills proved a particularly popular option. Many clients felt that they lacked the confidence to promote themselves and their skills and were unaware of the vital importance of good preparation. We were able to offer participants the opportunity of a mock interview with a Community Employment Base worker or a local personnel manager.

Future Plans

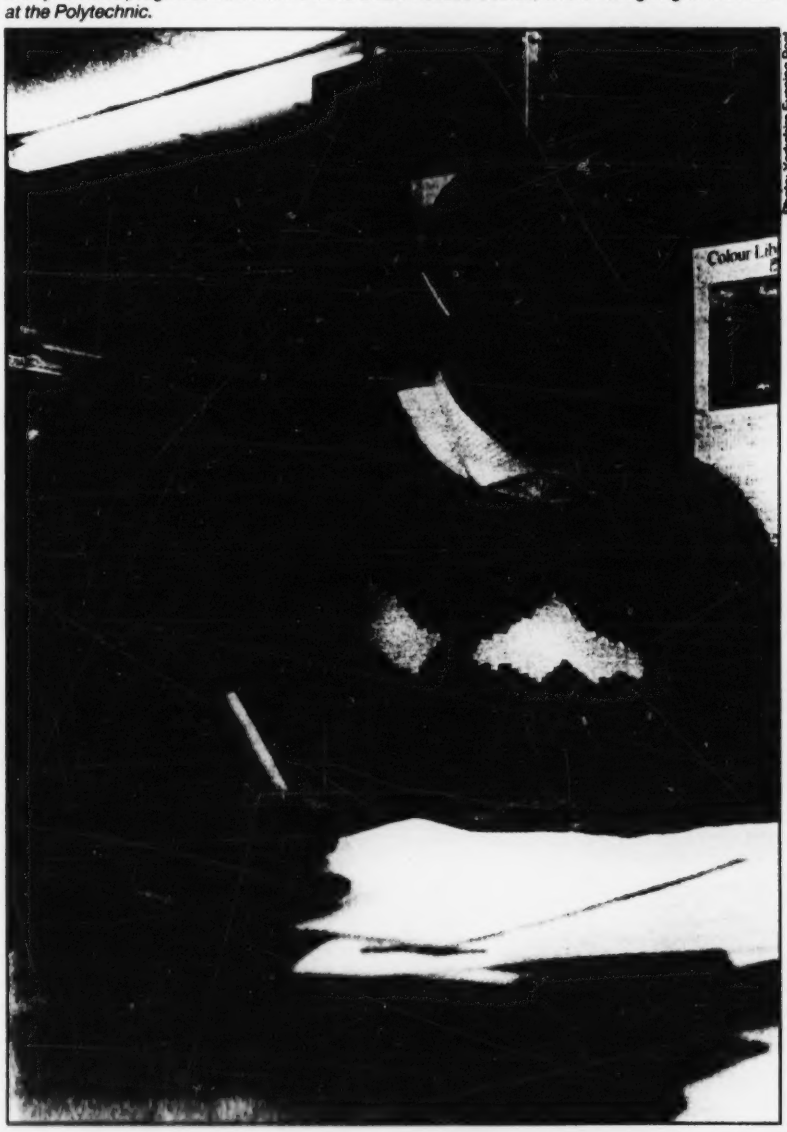
As the project draws to a close we are now looking forward to continued links with our local newspaper and a further 'distance learning' project with a new theme.

An added bonus to the project was the contact which we made with the local British Rail Headquarters for 'employer feedback' on interview technique. There was considerable interest and assistance for the project from the personnel managers and the Open Learning Centre has received useful job search related materials. As a direct result we are now negotiating programmes of basic communication skills work with BR North Eastern region.

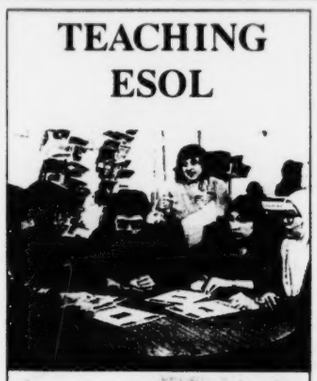
Conclusion

The general response to the project was very positive from all concerned. We were particularly pleased to build up good links with local employers; to promote a high profile for the work being done on basic skills in the community, and to enable the acquisition of job search skills by a wider public. ■

Marilyn Jeffers progressed from the OLC to a Law Access Course, and is now going to read Law at the Polytechnic.



Information



A starter video
for teachers of English
for Speakers of Other Languages

Teaching ESOL

A starter video for teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages.

This video is aimed at tutors with no ESOL experience. Focussing on the development of speaking and listening skills, it follows two students in one-to-one situations and illustrates:

- The process of initial assessment.
- Examples of ESOL teaching strategies including drill; dialogue; role-play; listening for gist and detail; communications activity.
- Negotiating and designing a learning programme.
- Evaluating and recording student progress.

The contents list includes running times so that tutors can more easily select parts of the video if they wish. Main sections can be lifted and used with related sessions of the training course to introduce modules and assignments. In addition tutors can use selected parts for highlighting examples or illustrating various exercises and teaching methods.

Teaching ESOL is designed to be used as part of initial tutor training in ESOL primarily relating to the City & Guilds Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills (ESOL) 9284 but will be of use to all ESOL practitioners in colleges and community education.

Produced jointly by Leeds City Council, Leeds TEC, TEED, Action for Cities and ALBSU, copies are available from ALBSU.

Price: £20 plus £3.50 VAT and 75p postage on each copy. Running time: 30 mins.

Viewpoints 13

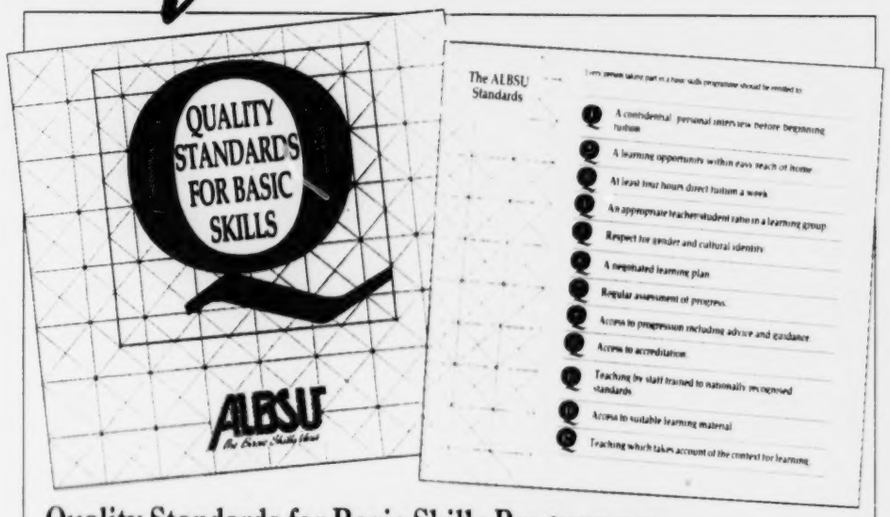
Approaches to Learning in Basic Skills

The latest *Viewpoints* examines the role of *context* in basic skills programmes, its effect on the curriculum and the way in which it is delivered.

Areas covered include:

- The teaching of reading
- Vocationally related basic skills
- The teaching of spelling

Price: £1.85
Postage: 1 copy 38p; 5 copies £2.00; 10 copies £3.15.



Quality Standards for Basic Skills Programmes

Full details of ALBSU's recently launched *Quality Standards for Basic Skills Programmes* are laid out in this free booklet. ALBSU's 'Quality Standards' set out the minimum a student or trainee should be entitled to expect from a basic skills programme. This booklet introduces the new 'Quality Mark' and outlines each of the twelve elements that make up the standards necessary to achieve that 'Quality Mark' and how to apply for it.

A leaflet entitled *Using the ALBSU Quality Mark* is also available from ALBSU free of charge.

New Posters

Eight new eye-catching posters are now available illustrating common situations in which English language, literacy or numeracy skills are useful.

There are three *For Help with Basic Maths* (Cooking; Shopping; Wages) and five *For Help with Reading and Writing* (Letter Writing; Job Search; Job Centre; Library; Family Reading). Each poster provides a space for the address and telephone number of a local contact.

Each poster is available from ALBSU in two sizes:

Large (15" x 20"):
10 = £5.00; 20 = £10.00; 50 = £20.00
Small (7" x 9"):
50 = £1.25; 100 = £2.50; 200 = £5.00

Plus postage:

Large: 10 posters £1.15;
20 posters £2.50; 50 posters £5.00
Small: 50 posters 66p;
100 posters £1.15; 200 posters £3.15

Eastbourne Award

Some of Eastbourne's Bengali restaurant workers receiving their certificates for the Basic Food Handling & Hygiene Course from Councillor Harold Royce, deputy chair Environmental Health & Public Protection Committee, Wealden District Council.

As part of an ALBSU sponsored project, Eastbourne College of Arts & Technology's Workplace project ran a ten hour English for Special Purposes course for workers intending to take the Food Handling & Hygiene Course.

Sophie Hepworth, Wealden District Council Environmental Health tutor said: *'This is the very first group who knew what I was talking about when I mentioned that well known bacteria "Staphylococcus aureus".'*

Star Opening

Local TV star Tim Healy, of 'Auf Wiedersehen Pet' fame, and his wife Denise Welch recently opened the Norham Open Learning Centre in North Shields. The centre has been established with help of £163,000 from Tyne and Wear Development Corporation whose Chief Executive, Alistair Balls, said at the opening *'The Development Corporation is enthusiastically supporting this initiative . . . which gives people who might not have fully realised their potential at school a fresh opportunity to develop their skills and confidence.'*

Health Matters

Health Matters is a pack providing paperware for use with the viewdata system Healthdata. It has been developed by the ALBSU Special Development Project WRITE (Information Technology and Basic Skills).

Health Matters consists of four assignments for use with Healthdata:

- Writing for a magazine
- Working with children
- Food additives
- Alcohol abuse

Each assignment is in booklet form and contains clear instructions. The assignments are linked to Wordpower and are intended to be used for independent learning.

Health Matters – available from: ILECC, John Ruskin Street, London SE5 0PQ.

Price: £10.00

Healthdata – available from: 21 Vicars Close, London E9 7HT.

Archimedes (£14.95), BBC (£12.95), Nimbus (£14.95 or £28.95 network); IBM (£19.95).

Curriculum Award

The Core Skills Workshop at North Devon College, Barnstable has been awarded a National Award for Curriculum. The Workshop, set up with the support of ALBSU Local Development Funding, created a resource base for learning support for adult students across the college and for adults from the North Devon Community. Over 800 students were supported in the first two years of operation. The project has now been embedded into mainstream provision.

Dennis Turner MP, Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tertiary Education presented the award to Sue Buss, Learning Resources Co-ordinator, at a ceremony held in the Jubilee Room at the House of Commons on June 17th.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

USING WORDPOWER WITH GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Chris Snudden, ABE tutor in South East Norfolk, outlines ways in which working with young adults may call for different approaches, and describes work with a young mothers' group and with Youth Training.

Introduction

Young adults who have been identified in a target group with basic skills needs, offer challenges to the working practices and general philosophy of Adult Basic Education. Students on youth and adult training schemes, in colleges of further education, in the workplace, or using support agencies, can have a group identity that if not accommodated may work against the effective delivery of an adult, negotiated learning situation. These target groups tend to exist as part of an organisation which often places the basic skills tutor on the outside. Groups of young people can exhibit an artificial and even intimidating confidence which can threaten the important relationship between student and tutor or volunteer. This group solidarity is reminiscent of the classroom ethos. It is vital in approaching these groups that we acknowledge this and apply it constructively in our teaching methods and learning strategies.

Wordpower	Stage 1	
UNIT 009.1	Write letters, reports, notes and other messages.	Set up group simulation exercise of an office workplace. Use role cards, impose realistic tasks that involve the example activities. Covered unit 10.1, 10.2 and 10.4 (Working with clerical trainees it was appropriate to use typewriters).
009.2	Convey ideas, feelings and experiences in written form.	Group brainstorm about earliest childhood memories. Good and bad childhood experiences. Read range of true-life magazine articles. Wrote about personal experience.
UNIT 010.1	Provide information to one person.	Office simulation and various roleplay exercises. Tape-recorded telephone introductions, general messages and transcribed, or scripted dialogue in pairs.
010.2	Obtain information from one person.	
010.3	Hold a conversation with one person.	
010.4	Support and reassure someone who is in an unfamiliar situation.	
UNIT 012.1	Obtain information from a live talk.	Discussed problems and techniques of taking notes. Practised in small groups where one person talked about a familiar and straightforward topic like use of capital letters. Group extracted major points and listed. Applied this to their own training lectures.
012.2	Obtain information from a radio or TV broadcast.	Practised in pairs identifying key points in a tape-recording about preparing for a job interview. In groups students used notes from this and 'Game For a Job' video to prepare an advice pack.

Example activities used with YT group.

A group approach to Wordpower

Wordplus is a collaborative training venture, funded by Norfolk and Waveney TEC, and delivered by Norfolk County Council Adult Education Service. Part of this initiative has been to offer short courses in basic skills – to industry and training organisations. A group of twelve YT students from various schemes run by South Norfolk District Council was identified by Wordplus, and an analysis of their needs produced. The result was an eight week course using three units of Wordpower Stage 1 and a similar number of units from Numberpower as a framework for skill development and accreditation. For a variety of reasons, not least the pressure of time, a group based teaching approach was adopted. My initial use of different learning materials on a one to one basis resulted in a feeling of unease and suspicion. It was soon obvious that a route to dealing with specific individual learning had to be found in a working atmosphere which was comfortable for the learners.

Great Yarmouth Young Women's Project

The Great Yarmouth Young Women's Project is a housing, advice and support centre for young mothers aged between 16 and 25. It is funded by the Girls Friendly Society and has collaborated with the Youth Service and Adult Education and the Norfolk Youth Service. They have recently been awarded a grant from ALBSU to pilot an education programme over 40 weeks. The course is aimed at 10 women with social, life and basic skills needs. For some of the group members pregnancy interrupted, or ended their school careers, for others the system had simply failed them. All of them are currently responsible adults, caring for their children often with severe financial and housing problems. They carry an enormous load on their shoulders, yet twice a week they place their children in the crèche provided and trust their hopes and

ambitions for a better educational experience to an adult education course.

It was a member of this group who was perfectly serious in her request that a gold star merit system for their work would be valuable. At the start of the course several members of the group bought exercise books and dutifully covered them in wallpaper. This could suggest that it was necessary for them to sub-consciously pick up from where they either left, or were switched off by the school education system. This group were quite confused about their identity and roles. They wanted to call me Miss, to be playfully uncooperative. They asked for homework and marks out of ten. In the early days they forgot their pens, and left their folders on the kitchen table. They drifted in twenty minutes late, got up during discussions to have a cigarette or make coffee, and left at any point in the proceedings if their hunger pangs necessitated a visit to the local bakers. The ex-school teachers amongst us will recognise this behaviour. These misguided attempts at using the freedom associated with their voluntary status, were really an adolescent abuse of an adult learning environment. Rules and expectations had to be established in an explicit way. Whilst continuing to treat them as adults, for in the real world that is what they are, concessions had to be made for the lack of maturity and regressive behaviour which surfaced in the learning group. A more structured and secure atmosphere where expectations were clearly stated and achievable encouraged the students to behave in a more responsible manner. The social and life skills necessary for a real progression towards maturity are an intrinsic part of our work. We cannot in the mean time allow our students to hang themselves with the yards of rope that we could provide.

The thematic approach

One aspect of a more individual approach to learning is the extension of the school project. Moving students on from simply extracting chunks of text from books, and doing a lot of cutting and sticking of pictures, to a more functional and product related output, can be an imaginative and comprehensive application of the Wordpower framework. It can be used at all levels of Wordpower and can cover a surprising number of elements in a relatively short time.

Julie is twenty and the mother of a three and a half year old girl. She chose to look at the subject of Capital punishment.

As we have forty weeks to cover the course at the Young Women's Project, Julie is meeting the requirements of both Stage 1 and Stage 2 criteria before a decision is made later as to the level of her achievements. (It is important to note that we have full use of a telephone, typewriters and a wordprocessor).

	STAGE 1 Unit/Element	*STAGE 2 Unit/Element*
In three weeks she has:-		
Telephoned local library to enquire about joining.		016.2
Visited library and used the card index and computer terminal.		
Found relevant books. Used dictionaries and encyclopedias.	006.3	014.1
Talked to librarian and ordered other titles.		016.2
Read and extracted some facts and details from books.	006.1	013.1
Explained the case of the last man to hang to the rest of the group.	010.1 011.2	
Wanted to locate latest Home Office report into capital punishment – telephoned directory enquiries for number. Telephoned Home Office for their address and if possible to speak to Home Secretary!		016.2
Drafted letter		
Learned how to use Wordprocessor and printed letter.	009.1	015.2 015.3
Wrote to local MP for his view.		
Decided (on her own) to write to an opposition peer.	009.1	015.2 015.3
Wrote two paragraphs expressing her own opinion.	009.2	015.4
At home watched documentary on subject and made notes.	012.2	

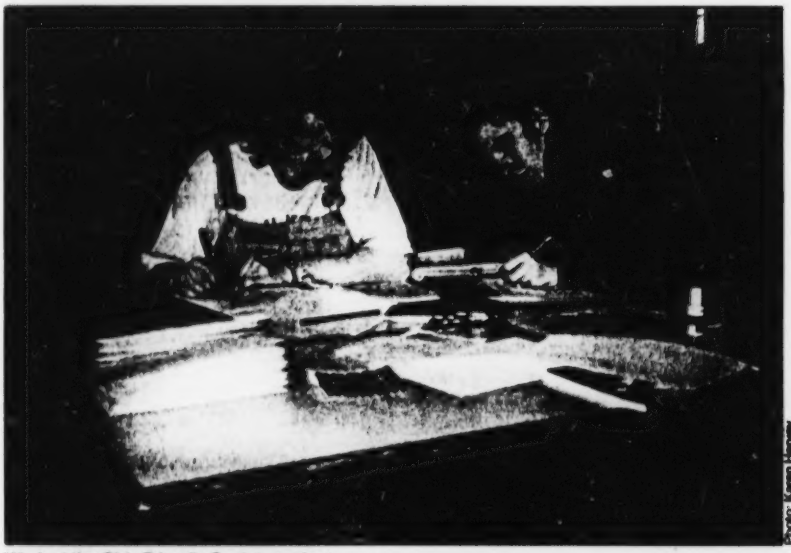


Photo: Karen Harvey

Work at the Girls Friendly Society project.

Older students working through Language Experience, or using a thematic approach will tend to readily select areas to explore related to their hobbies, home or work life. Younger students can find it difficult to make a choice, and when they do, it is often a fairly substantial and demanding topic. There is a tendency for them to pick up on something that they were introduced to at school, such as Capital Punishment, Cruelty to Animals, or to choose the preoccupations of their generation like Drugs, Sex and Music. Once they get going they develop a confidence from feeling that they have a superior knowledge about something. They are refreshingly uninhibited by conventions and socially acceptable routes. Julie wanted some information about Home Office policy and decided that a chat or letter to Kenneth Clark himself was appropriate. Unfortunately, on telephoning, he wasn't in.

Those of us who use Wordpower have our moans and groans as we would about any course. Its strength is its versatility and potentially flexible application. With groups of younger students it is necessary to accommodate their previous learning experiences and lead them gently and firmly along the path of self-motivation, individual awareness and ultimately the responsibility for their own learning. ■

AMERICAN LESSONS

What can we learn from literacy work in the States? Janet Swinney, seconded Development Officer at the Scottish Further Education Unit, highlights key issues facing providers and learners after the enactment of the National Literacy Act. She also draws lessons from the American experience for work in Scotland, which have equal relevance to the agenda for basic skills in England and Wales.

'I love to go back to school. My brains is in the dark times. Wait till my brains will come to the light!'

Lesroy Christian, student
Bronx Educational Services

Needs

Some 30 million adults in the United States, out of a total population of about 250 million, have serious problems with literacy. Or to put it another way, in New York 1.5 million people can't read. Within a context of declining economic performance, where poverty is on the increase and as many as 50 million workers may have to be trained or retrained by the year 2000, the fact that many adults are not fully literate is seen as a matter that requires urgent attention. Key findings of the United States Congress on adult literacy were:

- nearly 30 million adults have serious problems with literacy (out of a total population of approximately 250 million);
- literacy problems are intergenerational and closely associated with poverty and pose a major threat to the economic well-being of the United States;
- the prevention of illiteracy is essential to stem a further growth in national illiteracy rates;
- as many as 50 million workers may have to be trained or retrained before the year 2000;
- the supply of unskilled workers is increasing while the demand for unskilled labour is decreasing;
- all public and private literacy programmes (combined) serve only about 19 per cent of those who need help;
- literacy programmes generally lack adequate funding... and adequate investment in teacher training and technology;
- access to better information about... best practices... and more research... are essential.

In 1991, a comprehensive body of legislation reached the statute book.

Legal and funding frameworks

The National Literacy Act provides the framework for the development of basic education provision in the work-place, in prisons, for families and homeless people.

It defines literacy as:

'An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential.'

The Act provides incentives for states to set up resource centres to support the co-ordination of literacy provision, encourage innovation in the field and offer up-to-date training and technical support to providers.

Their duties will be to:

1. improve and promote the diffusion and adoption of state-of-the-art teaching methods, technologies and programme evaluations;
2. develop innovative approaches to the co-ordination of literacy services within and among States and with the Federal Government;
3. assist public and private agencies in co-ordinating the delivery of literacy services;
4. encourage government and industry partnerships, including partnerships with small businesses, private non-profit organisations, and community-based organisations;
5. encourage innovation and experimentation in literacy activities that will enhance the delivery of literacy services and address emerging problems;
6. provide technical and policy assistance to State and local governments and service providers to improve literacy policy and programmes and access to such programmes;
7. provide training and technical assistance in literacy instructors

OR

8. encourage and facilitate the training of full-time professional adult educators.

It outlines plans for a National Institute for Literacy which will focus on strategic planning, policy analysis, research and the dissemination of good practice.

The legislation omits a legal entitlement to education for adults who seek it. Instead, people's eligiblity for welfare benefit has been tied to whether or not they are enrolled in either a training programme or in literacy provision. This has been the case since 1988. But now the policy will have practical impact if increased federal resources are used to create the necessary places on courses and programmes at local level. Those adult educators who have realised the implications are horrified. People are not at their best when they are coerced to learn. A sounder option would have been to raise public awareness of the benefits of learning in adulthood and to guarantee access to provision.

The field is peppered with a range of providers. In any one state it is possible to find the board of education, the library service, universities and corporate organisations – community based or otherwise – all engaged in the business of offering literacy services. Federal money is allocated to the state each year according to a formula based on the number of students not completing high school. Additionally, the state, or in the case of New York, the city, sets aside a further amount for literacy provision. Providers of all descriptions bid for this money, drafting their submissions against specified criteria. Earmarking has the advantage that the money cannot be diverted into the other causes. It also ensures that the requirements of priority groups are not ignored.

There are disadvantages. Educators bemoan the amount of time spent writing

applications, and then collecting information which demonstrates to funders that they have been successful in meeting the stipulated criteria. They also point out that being funded on an annual basis creates discontinuity in their work which is unhelpful both to themselves and to their students. The corporate organisations hustle for additional funding from every conceivable source, from philanthropic trusts to industry. Virtually every organisation, large or small, smart or shabby, has an executive director who spends the majority of their time on this function.

Even with the government's new commitment, it appears unlikely that funding from public and private sources added together will be enough to provide the country with the service it needs. Ironically, as federal commitment is increasing, the private sector's, which is influenced by the economic climate, is declining. On the other hand, in most of the programmes I visited students were able to attend for up to 15 hours per week: attendance of less than six hours was considered not viable. In Scotland, students would be lucky to receive more than two hours a week even if they were desperate.

Measuring success

Controversy surrounds the performance indicators used by the government and other funders to measure success. Students are regularly subjected to TABE, an antiquated standardised test which would cause practitioners and students in the United Kingdom to faint with horror. The ultimate accolade of achievement is when a student passes the GED, an equivalent of the high school leaving certificate which is regarded as a passport to employment. Unfortunately, the GED tests students' knowledge of all those things the rest of us have forgotten since we left school because they were useless.

The silver lining in this cloud is that practitioners and academics are making significant progress in identifying performance indicators that have some meaning for students. Students' increased participation in classroom activities, community organisations and their children's schooling were three areas being looked at at one centre as possible measures of success. Ultimately, perhaps, such developments will influence the thinking of funders. The support given by academics and the relevance of their research activities was, in this and other cases, striking.

Initiatives

Despite such constraints, initiative flourishes. The terms 'family literacy' and 'work-place literacy' have been interpreted with great latitude and teaching methods and approaches were as varied as the people using them. I saw tutors working in clapped-out premises – though no more clapped out than a lot of our own – to stimulate critical thinking, community awareness and self-confidence on the part of their students: in short, to empower them. Of course, in a multi-racial society with a past complicated by colonialism, the debate about which language to be literate in is a hot potato. Although in the government's terms literacy means 'literacy in English', in New York, where there are many Hispanic and Afro-American students, tutors were working with source materials that encouraged students to take a positive interest in their own and others' cultural and linguistic heritage.

Everywhere there was evidence of students' writing that is powerful because it derived from raw experience. Students' pride in their achievements, their ambition, their vulnerability, their warmth, their faith in their tutors – all these convinced me that, principalities and powers aside, the literacy experience is the same the world over.

Lessons for a manifesto

Scotland's own circumstances are changing fast. It is a society sitting on the verge of some form of political autonomy: it needs an informed populace that can play an active part in shaping the future. The country's statistics for adult literacy are not much different, percentage-wise, from those of the United States. What Scotland can learn from the American experience is the importance of giving adults a legal entitlement to learn; of treating basic learning as a crucial aspect of the educational agenda; of identifying national priorities for basic education and creating the context in which providers can achieve them; of increasing investment so that adults can have the scale of service they need; of using measures of success that students themselves would recognise as meaningful; of creating a national infrastructure for the support of adult learning so that it becomes part of the educational fabric of Scottish society; of encouraging research; and, above all, of remembering the basic humanity of those for whom literacy is a cherished ambition. ■

Reprinted by kind permission of the Times Educational Supplement, Scotland, in which this article first appeared on 13 March 1992.

Janet Swinney visited programmes in Washington, New York, Philadelphia and Houston having been awarded the 1991 Walter Hines Page scholarship, sponsored by the English Speaking Union and the Educational Institute of Scotland.

There is so much child abuse in the world that is never known. I am one of the people that has experienced child abuse. I was never loved or hugged. I had to stay in my room all the time. Sometimes I had to go without dinner. I was told that I was a stupid kid and could not spell, so I had to bend over a chair.

I can never remember a time that my mother or step-father hugged me or said to me the little words, 'I love you'. As a kid, that means a lot. When it was my birthday, I did not have a party or a cake. It was just another day to them. My mother didn't have time for me – just my brothers. I would wet the bed just so my mother would pay attention to me and not my brothers. She would hang the sheet out of the window so that everyone would know that I had wet the bed, then she would make me put my wet underwear over my head and stand in the corner for a long time.

My parents would come in late after they would get off work. Then they would go to the club and drink. My brothers had to take care of me, and they would always tell on me. They would not let me watch TV at all. My older brother made me have sex with him, or else he would beat me up.

I had a very hard time with the little bit of schooling that I had. It was not that I did not try, but it is very hard to learn when you are not loved or wanted. I could not spell a word, so my mother would make me bend over a chair for a long time and look at the word. I was always told that I was retarded and could not learn anything; therefore, I was put in a state school and had to work myself out of the school. I was there for about seven years.

Then I was put in a half-way house. I did not like it there at all. I ran away one time and went to my grandmother's for two months. My other grandmother turned me in, so I had to go back to the half-way house. Then I became pregnant and they kicked me out of the half-way house. My mother had my baby put up for adoption and had my tubes tied.

I did go to visit my grandparents on the holidays from the state school. In a way, that was good and in some ways, it was bad. They always took me to the beer joints. I saw my grandfather hit my grandmother and blacken her eye. He was a sweet man when he was not drinking (sober), but when he drank, he was mean to me also.

One of my cousins would let me spend time with his family. His wife was always very sweet to me and helped me in many ways; for example, she got the word 'retarded' removed from my records.

Linda Hart
Houston, Texas

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WHY DO STUDENTS LEAVE?

Margaret Morris, co-ordinator of the Swansea Open Learning Centre, describes how they set out to answer this question.

Why we did it

Why had some of our students left? Had their stay with us been worthwhile?

These questions had flitted through our minds and been discussed informally but what focussed our minds on these issues was the impending visit of an HMI and the knowledge that there would be the inevitable questions about the methods we were using to (a) monitor student progress, and (b) to assess our performance as tutors at the Open Learning Centre.

How we did it

We decided to use a questionnaire. The wording was carefully worked out by a think-tank of tutors and students. We were agreed that we wanted it to sound positive and friendly.

Which students we targetted

It was difficult to know which students to target as we were not sure who had left. Students have a habit of popping up after a prolonged absence. We did not wish to offend anyone. We decided to mail the questionnaires to all those students that we had not seen for several months. We debated whether to enclose a stamped addressed envelope for a reply but decided that the money involved, £48, would be better spent on resources. We did however include addressed envelopes. We sent out 240 questionnaires.

Results

We received information about 53 students. The most informative replies came in the form of letters which gave more detailed replies.

From the replies, phone calls and visits we received the following information:

No. of students	*Reason for Leaving*
8	New job
6	On another course
14	Family/personal reasons
6	Moved away
4	Ill-health
1	In prison
4	Dissatisfied
1	Couldn't manage the stairs

9 students said they hadn't left and promised to return.

What did we learn?

The replies proved interesting. They added information to our database and we learnt about ourselves and our service. This is what we learned:

'More set out work would have helped me instead of looking for something at the time.'

'I must have come at an awkward time because most of the tutors were off.'

'Further structuring/monitoring needed.'

'You need a bigger workplace.'

'I was made aware that the centre is meant for young people only.'

'Excellent.' *'Very satisfied.'*

'The atmosphere was wonderful.'

'The staff were most helpful.'

'I wish the idea of Open Learning to be spread and encouraged.'

I was put off by having to sit in a very cold room on one occasion - this was followed by a young man butting in and demanding attention when the 'instructor' was speaking to me.

'I was treated with respect and learned things I did not know.'

'I left because I was taught everything I needed to know.'

Would we do it again?

Most definitely. It was a lot of work (many thanks to Barbara Courtney our Administrative Assistant for her hard work) but worthwhile and a useful method for monitoring the ABE service. ■

Readers may be interested to know that ALBSU is sponsoring a one year research project, with the Institute of Education, which is looking in detail at the issues of drop out and progression in basic skills work with adults.

Confidential **STUDENT PROGRESS**

We enjoyed working with you at The Open Learning Centre. Because we like to know what happens to our students when they leave us we would be pleased if you would fill in this form and return it to us.

Remember we will always be pleased to see you if you would like to return.

Please tell us why you left us:

Do you now have a job? If so what?

Are you going on to another course? If so what?

Did you leave for personal reasons? Yes No

Other reasons?

How satisfied were you with the service at the Centre?

Cou

The reason that I stopped coming to the Open Learning Centre so abruptly three weeks ago was that I was offered a few days work. This then developed into three weeks and today I have been told that it will continue for at least another month and may well become a permanent situation. So, it looks as though my visits to the YMCA have to cease.

I would like to thank you all for all the help you gave me in the weeks I came to the O.L.C. and in particular to Carl/Karl for his great patience with me. (By the way, I'm now convinced that the computers have Michaelangelo Disease and that it wasn't my fault at all!)

Thanks once again, and if I do get the opportunity to call in one day I shall do to see how you're all getting on.

Ka

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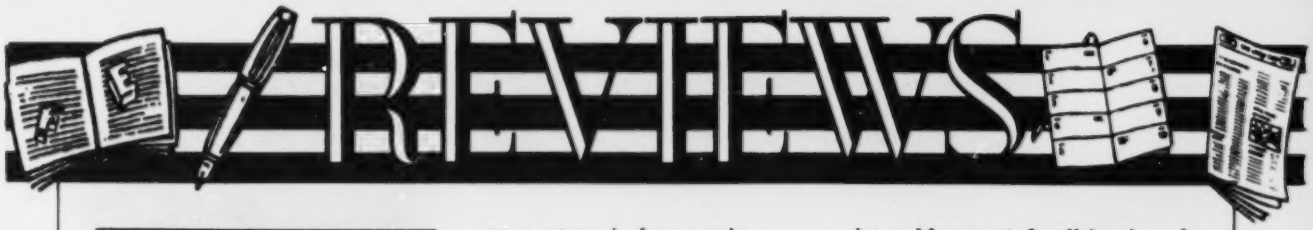

The Handwriting, Reading and Spelling System

by Alan Davies

Published by Alan Davies, Chartered Educational Psychologist, Writetrack, 11a Kilmorey Park, Chester CH2 3QS.

Price: £4.78 for the 4 booklets and 2 tapes plus 10% p&p (minimum £1.00)

ISBN:
THRASS Word-Spelling Copybook
0 951 566 245
THRASS Word-Spelling Form
0 951 566 253
THRASS Word-Spelling Tape
0 951 566 261
THRASS Sound-Spelling Copybook
0 951 566 277X
THRASS Sound-Spelling Form
0 951 566 288
THRASS Sound-Spelling Tape
0 951 566 296

The *Handwriting, Reading and Spelling System'* (THRASS), claims to 'help children and adults who wish to improve their handwriting, reading and spelling'. It is a brave approach, attempting to programme learning through the use of audio tapes, however, after a number of hearings, I am still unclear about how much prior learning is required of the learner and how much of the tape is attempted at each session. I am also in need of a manual to explain the learning strategy and some of the curious phraseology used. I also miss the visual help and stimulus of illustration and the written word.

The system is instructive rather than participative. Little reference is made to the verbal interaction/communication between learner and tutor which underpins so much good adult learning, or to the multi-sensory approach to learning spelling that is so helpful to learners with short term memory problems. There is also no allowance made for questions to be asked and difficulties to be sorted out.

The Spelling Sound Tape begins with a series of instructions, proceeds to sound spellings for the listener to repeat and 'underpoint the sound spellings, say the sound for all the 148 sounds', without explanation. For adults who encounter difficulties with spelling this is a laborious process with too much to do at one sitting and can be compared with trying to learn tables before there is an understanding of numbers and the relationships between them.

I would question some of the statements made, for example, 'printed letters make word spellings clearer to picture but joined spellings make the word quicker to write'.

I feel that this is only half a system and that, although it is inexpensive at £4.78 for the booklets and tapes, there are other more user friendly and stimulating resources for basic skills tutors to access. One tutor in our Centre commented, 'it might be all right for a parent helping a slow learning child – if you were desperate!'

Freda Waterhouse
Basic Skills Tutor Organiser
Cornwall Education Authority

Words Are What I've Got

Compiled by the International Task Force on Literacy

Published by Sister Vision Press, Toronto

Distributed by Avanti Books, 8 Parsons Green, Boulton Road, Stevenage SG1 4QG

Price: £10.00 plus £2.50 p&p

ISBN 0 920813 46 1

This beautifully produced collection of writings is the result of the 'Book Voyage' which travelled to villages, places of work, homes and community centres throughout the world during International Literacy Year. Its ambitious aim is to, 'create the sentences and paragraphs of a new, more just world' and this aim is reflected in the writings which strongly promote the role of women and the issues of freedom and justice.

The book is divided into sections roughly covering the five continents with samples of students' work printed in the original language and handwriting and then translated into English, French and Spanish. Statistical details about each country make enlightening reading, but these statistics vary from country to country and it is not always easy to make comparisons. Also, why are the concerns of the women sometimes referred to as a 'Women's Lot' sometimes as 'Status of Women' and sometimes not at all? These are, however, minor criticisms of what is an impressive piece of research on over fifty countries illustrated with powerful black and white photographs.

The writings themselves are the essence of the book and range from simple, straight forward statements of hope: 'My name is Ann Kabwela . . . I want to know how to write a letter,' to the passionate, the political and the poetic. 'For those who have been educated liberation shall come easily.'

This is a wonderful book for tutors and students to dip into and it will inspire them with a variety of ideas for writing and discussion. The use of the original languages as well as the translations in French and Spanish offer imaginative ABE and ESOL tutors scope for work on language structure and derivation of words as well as creative writing.

This book made me realise that the work we do as students, volunteers and tutors is part of a worldwide effort to offer a voice to marginalised women and men so that they can improve the quality of their lives; in the words of Ndaheberanye Leonard from Burundi: 'After all, life is like water, which once spilled down cannot be retrieved.'

Christine Mavrakis, ABE Co-ordinator
Daventry Tertiary College
Northamptonshire Education Authority

A Guide to Living in Britain for Refugees from Vietnam

by Ruth Wilson

Published by Refugee Action

Available from: Refugee Action Handbooks, The Offices, The Cedars, Oakwood, Derby DE2 4FY

Price: £5.00 (to cover p&p)

ISBN 0 948 197 161

The majority of Vietnamese people who first came to settle in Britain had no English background and knew very little about Britain and the style of life here. There are even many Vietnamese who have been here for several years and apparently still cannot speak English well enough to enable them to cope with everyday problems. Apart from that, the society and system here are completely new to them and they seem really to be struggling with their new life here and often find it difficult to adjust and integrate themselves into the system.

In fact it is the lack of communication which keeps them from being well informed about life here, and in particular the customs and habits of English people. It is clear that, in order to be well informed, it is necessary to have some way or method of passing

on information. Attempts have been made through the translation of documents relating to such important matters as welfare benefits, housing, health, education and training. However, the leaflets that are produced for this purpose often do not seem to make their way directly to Vietnamese people. The information contained in them is sometimes quite limited, or not really relevant or practical.

The package produced in 1991 by Refugee Action is extremely good, since it contains useful information for every day basic needs, for example, in connection with rights when applying for welfare benefits, which are absolutely essential as an important first item. Equally important are housing and health care and very supportive is help with family reunions. Last, but not least, the guidelines on education and training are clearly presented and easy to follow. The package is full of basic information which is essential for all those who are unfamiliar with the new society in which they are living.

However, this package was produced some time ago, so there is some information contained in it about matters which have changed in the meantime. This applies in particular to the section on education and training. Anyone using this package must therefore make themselves aware of such changes. This package is extremely useful as reference material and is best used by a teacher/tutor who is working with a class of Vietnamese or by anyone who has dealings with Vietnamese people in general.

It was an excellent idea to produce such a much-needed information package and thanks are due to the people responsible for preparing it.

Cang Tran
ESOL Tutor
Birmingham Education Authority

A Way with Forms

by D. Williams, S. Wilkinson, I. Wilkinson, J. Wilson

Published by Scottish Community Education Council, West Coates House, 90 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5LQ

Price: Workbook £8.95 inc. p&p
Video £20.00 inc. p&p
10 Workbooks & 1 Video £96.00 inc. p&p

No ISBN

This Pack has been developed for the student working independently or as a member of a group and is on the topic of form filling. It has been professionally produced with colour-coded sections, clear print, some well spaced layout and even a video to accompany the pack – particularly good for use with groups.

A small self-assessment activity forms the first section which could help the students to identify the specific items on which they need to work. There is also opportunity to acknowledge feelings that are aroused when confronted by forms. In order that this is a positive activity, however, I do hope that students would discuss their reactions with others as the pack encourages a '5 – no chance' response to all of the situations could be very demoralising at this stage.

The pack is divided into three sections:

Unit 1 – Filling in Short Forms

Unit 2 – Applying for a Driving Licence

Unit 3 – Job Applications.

Students who have looked at the materials have identified Unit 1 as being quite useful. The Unit develops particular features such as different ways of asking for the same information, use of abbreviations and reading the small print. All of these, however, would need further reinforcement before moving on to other sections.

The next two Units are disappointing after this. They both take specific forms and pick out certain features to work through. Too many items are introduced in very quick succession and students found it very difficult to identify what they were supposed to be learning. Two potentially useful supporting activities were wasted through insufficient information being provided (and in the word/meaning matching activity there were several errors that would make successful completion impossible).

Unfortunately, the self-assessment does not really form the basis of the learning activities that follow and the pack lacks cohesion. The spelling mistakes and inaccuracies really limit the extent to which the pack can be used.

This was a good idea for materials but unfortunately not enough attention has been paid to the detail.

Audrey Stewart
Basic Skills Co-ordinator
Loughborough College
Leicestershire Education Authority

Short Notice

Teaching Literacy to Bilingual Adults: A Guide for ESL Tutors

Produced by Ethnic Minorities Language Service, Todds Nook Adult Education Centre, Monday Crescent, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 5BD

Price: £2.50 inc. p&p

ISBN 0 902 653 784

This is a book with attached (copyright free) loose sheets. The pack focuses on the particular problems which bilingual students meet when learning to read and write English and is limited to the early stages of literacy acquisition. Primarily intended as a guide for home tutors, it assumes no previous experience in ESOL teaching.

The ALBSU Newsletter is published four times a year, in November, February, May and July. Copies are available, free, to organisations and individuals. We aim to publish articles of interest to those teaching in adult literacy, second language and basic skills, those who are responsible for funding and organising the provision, and those who are generally interested in these important areas of work.

If you have ideas on topics which you would like to see covered, please contact the Editor, at ALBSU. Reviews of relevant publications are written for the newsletter by practitioners, and we are interested to receive publications which could be useful in basic education.

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, Kingsbourne House, 229/231 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA. Tel: 071-405 4017.

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AUTUMN
1992

No 47

NEWSLETTER

ALBSU

The Basic Skills Unit

Allied Steel and Wire

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HELPING ESOL STUDENTS IMPROVE THEIR PRONUNCIATION

BASIC SKILLS

A Wide Ranging Service

It's been important, in the last few months, to concentrate on the effect of the Further and Higher Education Act. As we have said a number of times in the last year, the Act is an important issue for basic skills. The inclusion of basic skills in Schedule 2 of the Act presents both opportunities and challenges. Some of these will be difficult, although the opportunities and challenges if basic skills was not in Schedule 2 may have been even more difficult.

The Further Education Funding Councils' (FEFCs) have a substantial task in the next few years. They will need to decide on an effective method of funding further education, as well as develop an approach to judging the effectiveness of different provision and how far it provides 'value for money'. All of this is likely to take place in a climate where there may be less public money available, the economy will continue to be depressed, industrial competition will be ever more fierce and with continued high levels of unemployment. Not the easiest time to deal with change.

FUNDING AND EVALUATING BASIC SKILLS

Funding basic skills and deciding how programmes are evaluated presents a particular set of problems. What we think about these thorny but key issues is set out extensively in a recent ALBSU publication, *Challenges and Choices*. (See the Information Pages in this Newsletter). We strongly advocate an earmarked budget for basic skills, although we recognise that this may go against the trend to leave most funding decisions to local discretion. We don't advocate earmarked funding lightly, however. We advocate it because we believe that where earmarked funding has been available, basic skills provision has been stronger and better planned. It could be, of course, that earmarking will fix funding at a particular level and no more will ever be available. We don't think that this will be the case, however. Often earmarked funds have been 'topped up' with additional resources through local discretion. Furthermore, the major national 'earmarking' in basic skills – Section 11 funding for ESOL – is often the core of expenditure, not all expenditure. (Who believes that without earmarked funding for ESOL the scale of provision would be greater?).

An argument used against earmarking is that if earmarked funding is agreed for basic skills, every sector and programme area will want a similar arrangement. It's not really likely, however. Whilst there is a case for earmarking funding for some specialist areas, such as basic skills and special needs, we doubt whether there will be many proposals to earmark funding for engineering or A Levels or BTEC courses.

At the end of the day, of course, it's a matter for the FEFCs rather than for ALBSU. We are doing all we can to help the FEFCs and it is encouraging that FEFC officials are so willing to listen to different points of view and actively encourage proposals and suggestions. Certainly we are building a helpful and productive relationship with FEFC officials.

DEVELOPING DIVERSITY

Concentration on the immediate future for basic skills in further and adult education shouldn't be allowed to divert attention from our long term aim of building a wide ranging and diverse basic skills service. We need a basic skills service which crosses sectors, provides diverse opportunities to improve skills and involves a number of different agencies. Basic skills is not just a further education issue; or an adult education issue; or even just an education issue.

> *'We need a basic skills service which crosses sectors, provides diverse opportunities to improve skills and involves a number of different agencies.'*

To see it in the context of a single sector is, we believe, to narrow opportunities and limit choice.

In *Challenges and Choices* we describe two elements of basic skills provision – what we call 'Primary' provision and the growing area of basic skills 'Support'. 'Primary' provision is designed for people whose main purpose is to improve the basic skills of English language, reading, writing and/or basic maths. It includes 1:1, small groups, much of what takes place in Open Learning Centres and a range of short courses, focused on particular topics such as letter writing, spelling, etc. It's origin is in adult literacy and ESOL programmes,

> *'We don't advocate earmarked funding lightly, however. We advocate it because we believe that where earmarked funding has been available, basic skills provision has been stronger and better planned.'*

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although what is provided is much wider now.

Basic skills' 'Support' is often typified by provision for students in colleges of further education. It is intended for people who need to improve basic skills as part of some other activity, such as a college course or vocational training. Generally improving basic skills is secondary to getting through the course. It's usually provided through workshops or team teaching and it's an area which has developed considerably in the last few years.

BASIC SKILLS SUPPORT

Basic skills 'Support' is not just something that takes place in colleges for college students, however. Helping people improve their basic skills needs to be part of the work of many agencies. A range of voluntary and statutory agencies are beginning to recognise basic skills as a part, although not necessarily the major part, of their work. Basic skills is just as much an issue in economic regeneration and development, vocational and occupational training, housing, health care, childcare, legal aid and advice, etc as it is in education. We need increased development of opportunities as part of these and many other programmes in the next few years, if we are to make a substantial impact on the under education and under attainment of people.

Much is already happening of course. We have developed good links with a number of City Challenge programmes and grants to voluntary organisations in the last year have encouraged them to integrate basic skills as part of their work. There's only space to give a few examples but a grant to the National Council for One Parent Families is proving very effective. A similar grant to Help the Aged is helping them examine the basic skills needs of older people (a much neglected area). A recent grant to the Girls Friendly Society in Great Yarmouth is making it easier for them to help many of the most disadvantaged people and a similar grant to the London Connection is providing support with basic skills for people who are homeless.

This 'spreading out' of basic skills is not just happening nationally and we know that there's much greater diversity developing in many areas of England and Wales. It ranges from 'Support' provision to helping local agencies make their material accessible and easily understood. (Recent work we have undertaken with the Health Education Authority [HEA] on HIV/AIDS information has led to many requests for advice on simplification and presentation).

The most recent Newsletter from the Business Council for Effective Literacy (BCEL) in the United States illustrates what is happening in the USA. Alongside details about literacy and basic skills programmes throughout the States, information is included on the American Bar Association's Committee on Law and Literacy, the Florida Council on Ageing's project to increase access to literacy programmes for older adults, a pilot family literacy program for fathers in prison in Northampton, Pennsylvania and a National Work Group on Cancer and Literacy. There's also a considerable amount about various work place basic skills programmes.

> *'Widening the reach of basic skills will take vision. It will need good planning, coherence, secure funding and clear progression routes supported by accessible advice and guidance'*

REACHING MORE PEOPLE

There's good reason for ensuring that basic skills is not a single sector issue. Although there has been a significant increase in the number of people both seeking and getting help with basic skills in the last few years, it's likely that we will never reach more than a limited number of people through 'Primary' basic skills programmes. Even if the resources were available to expand existing basic skills programmes and set up new 'Primary' programmes, some people will never want to improve skills in this way. They may be disenchanted with what they see as formal education, not have the time needed for regular attendances and study, lack the level of commitment and motivation needed or simply have more urgent needs. If you are homeless, very poor or suffering from ill health, improving basic skills may be less important than dealing with the more immediate problems. Whatever we may wish there's probably a natural 'cap' on the number of people we will reach through 'Primary' basic skills programmes.

That basic skills programmes are not for everyone is not in doubt. A recent survey of almost 10,000 literacy and numeracy students indicated that of those who leave programmes, 1 in 4 leave after less than a month. This could be because they have very limited needs and aims, of course, and leave entirely satisfied. Or it may be that they are in the wrong place and are referred on to something more appropriate. It's more likely, however, that a large number of these early leavers are people who didn't realise how much commitment was needed or are not motivated enough to attend regularly or are not convinced by what is on offer. (The research being undertaken by the Institute of Education at London University into drop-out and progression will tell us more next year).

WORKING WITH FAMILIES

One of the areas of development needed in the next few years featured at our recent Annual Conference. Family Literacy programmes in the USA have demonstrated that working with under educated parents can not only improve their own basic skills, but can have a significant effect on the attainment of their children. Tom Sticht, from San Diego, who spoke at the Conference quoted recent research which indicates that the most significant effect on the attainment of children is the educational level of the parents, particularly the mother. There has been a substantial growth of Family Literacy programmes in the United States as these programmes and this approach are seen to be effective.

In the UK we have tended to persist with approaches which have divided parents from children, as though the education of adults and children is largely unconnected. Even more seriously, although we recognise that many children are failing with basic skills at school, we have continued to think that improvements in schools alone will deal with this persistent problem. To take an alternative view is not to decry the National Curriculum and more recent measures such as Reading Recovery. These are two essential elements in improving under education in our society. Unless, however, we recognise that the basic skills of parents will play a key role in determining the basic skills of children, any strategy for improvement will lack a crucial element.

CONCLUSION

Diverse basic skills provision will mean diversity of opportunities and providers. Diversity will mean that education institutions such as LEAs and colleges will never be, and will not see themselves as, the only providers. Many colleges and LEAs will recognise that, alongside the core of 'Primary' basic skills provision which they are responsible for, they need to be 'contractors' not just 'providers'. Contracting some basic skills provision through a number of other agencies will mean opportunities are available for people unlikely to attend a college or adult education centre, immediately, if ever, however good the outreach and publicity. Widening the reach of basic skills will take vision. It will need good planning, coherence, secure funding and clear progression routes supported by accessible advice and guidance. None of this will be easy particularly at the present time. Frankly it would be easy to 'tinker' at the margins. 'Tinkering' at the margins will provide some short term achievements and, perhaps, even some limited development. It won't have much impact, however, on the long term problem of under education and under skilling in our society. ■

SPECIFIC SPELLING DIFFICULTIES

The current concerns about standards of spelling in the UK are reflected in the priority that many adults with basic skills difficulties put on good spelling. Wendy Hinchcliffe of Gateshead College describes a short course designed to help adults improve their skills.

Introduction

The ability to spell is a skill many young and older students seem to have difficulty acquiring. Some students attending basic skills classes do not appear to learn to spell by the strategies being employed. In the main these students are voluntary and well motivated.

Students who attend basic skills classes are not the only ones who need help with spelling. Developing learning support in this college confirmed research carried out in other colleges, such as Wakefield District College. This research had produced evidence of a growing need for students on mainstream courses to be given help with basic skills.

National perspective

Concern about lack of spelling ability was also supported on a wider scale by research undertaken by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU). *Literacy, Numeracy and Adults* (ALBSU 1987) suggested 72% of those seeking basic skills help identified spelling as a difficulty.

Nationally, the 1981 Act, the 1988 Education Reform Act which introduced the National Curriculum and was preceded by the Kingman Report (1988) detailed spelling as yet another skill to be tested. National emphasis upon spelling in GCSE examinations and acknowledgement of the need for basic skills provision in the 1992 Act, together with this college's concern for quality provision and equal opportunities, gave impetus to the idea of a new approach to tackling spelling.

ALBSU Project in Specific Learning Difficulties

Inability to spell and general lack of basic skills may result in truancy at the compulsory school age. In colleges and further education lack of basic skills contributes towards high drop out rates from courses, with consequent lowering of self esteem, end of course grades and employment prospects.

Evidence gained from many basic skills groups throughout the country supported this suggestion. The ALBSU Newsletter No.32, 1989, states:

'The ALBSU project in specific learning difficulties was initiated precisely because of growing awareness that a number of students in literacy schemes were not making the progress expected in spite of their obvious potential or were seriously underachieving in jobs or education because of persistent spelling difficulties.'

These students need more structured strategies to compensate for their difficulties in perceptual/motor and linguistic processing skills.

Attending several courses organised by the Dyslexia Association also suggested that dyslexic type difficulties with reading and spelling were sometimes not 'picked up' in schools. These literacy difficulties often remain a problem for adult learners. Many colleges are now making efforts to redress this lack of core skills by providing learning support services.

The idea behind the short spelling course

In this College, since March 1991, the spelling programme detailed in Klein & Millar (1990) has been used with both basic skills students and mainstream college students. Some of these students were undiagnosed dyslexics, some had been diagnosed as dyslexic. The programme worked well and students found they were beginning to learn and retain spellings.

The spelling programme was used on a 1:1 basis as part of learning support and also incorporated into two Bridging English Courses. The success of the programme within these courses made it apparent that the programme might be useful to build into a short course on spelling.

'Specific Spelling Difficulties' a ten week short course

The spelling programme was incorporated into a ten week spelling course. This involved elements of paired tutoring but retained the philosophy inherent in basic skills teaching, student centred learning. The aim in offering the course was threefold:

- to attract new students into basic skills classes but also to cater for those existing students who felt they would like to try a new approach to their spelling difficulties
- to offer support for students with dyslexia
- to use the course as a 'trial run' and see if it could usefully contribute towards a learning support model.

To date, the course has run three times. The groups have been small to accommodate some 1:1 teaching within the group setting. The courses have been successful in that all the students who attended improved their spelling. Not only that, they have a set of strategies which they can take with them and incorporate into any other courses they may undertake.

The short course and materials used are detailed overleaf:

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Reflection

All who took part in the spelling course agreed it was useful. Basic skills tutors who took part in the ALBSU training course 'Supporting Students with Specific Learning Difficulties' throughout the North of England, and those who participated in the same course in other parts of the country, all agreed as to the usefulness of the spelling programme.

It would be interesting to subject the short spelling course to more rigorous analysis. Larger numbers would obviously provide more reliable information. Using a larger sample would, however, introduce other variables into the data and make analysis more complex. Of necessity, groups need to be small to carry out this spelling programme in order to facilitate some individual teaching. The time scale of the short course on spelling was short. Longer exposure to the spelling programme would undoubtedly provide more reliable results.

SPECIFIC SPELLING DIFFICULTIES

10 weeks – 2 hours per week

Overall aims of the course:
To give students information and strategies to assess and improve their own spelling.

Week 1.

- Specific spelling difficulties
- Introduction to the spelling programme/ dictation/free writing
- The importance of handwriting
- Introduce the 'Language of Spelling' (vowels)

Week 2.

- Spelling Analysis
- Spelling Programme
- Spelling Strategies for specific difficulties
- Language of Spelling (short and long vowels, consonants, etc)
- ACE Spelling Dictionary

Week 3.

- Spelling Programme
- Introduce Proof Reading
- Simple Spelling Rules (from Sound Sheet)
- Key Words List incorporating more spelling strategies

Week 4.

- Spelling Programme
- Proof Reading Exercise
- Reinforce 'Language of Spelling' and simple rules
- Introduce Apple Macs (if students want to use these)

Week 5.

- Spelling Programme
- Spelling History
- Apple Macs

Week 6.

- Spelling Programme
- Review and reflect upon handouts from first five weeks
- Silent Letters

Week 7.

- Spelling Programme
- Prefixes and Suffixes
- Introduce doubling

Week 8.

- Spelling Programme
- Reinforce Prefixes and Suffixes
- Open and Closed Syllables

Week 9.

- Spelling Programme
- Use of dictionaries (including ACE)
- Reflect/Consolidate
- Individual Concerns

Week 10.

- Spelling Programme
- Post Test
- What Next
  - AEB phased test (3 levels) leads to Bridging English
  - City & Guilds Wordpower, 3 levels
  - AEB Bridging English
  - GCSE or vocational course

Information for worksheets selected from the following:

Unscrambling Spelling, Cynthia Klein & Robin Millar, 1990 (Hodder & Stoughton).

The Spelling Pack, ALBSU, 1988 (ALBSU).

Spelling It Out, Rhiannedd Pratley, 1988 (BBC).

A Speller's Companion, Hugh & Margaret Brown, 1987 (Brown & Brown).

Signposts to Spelling, Joy Pollock, 1980 (Heinemann).

Aurally Coded English Spelling Dictionary, David Moseley & Catherine Nicol, 1986 (Learning Development Aids).

Self Access Spelling: An Approach to Structured Spelling, Jan Hulley, 1991 (National Extension College).

Remedial Spelling, Violet Brand, 1985 (Egon Publishers) + Worksheets.

Diagnostic & Remedial Spelling Manual, Margaret Peters, 1975 (Macmillan).

Exercise Your Spelling, Books 1, 2 & 3, Elizabeth Wood, 1982 (Edward Arnold).

Change in Basic Skills

Change can be seen as threatening. New practices often indirectly but, quite rightly, question old practices. Education is changing rapidly, basic skills education has occasionally lagged behind some aspects of educational change. ALBSU is attempting to remedy this. Courses such as 'Supporting Students with Specific Learning Difficulties' and 'Quality in ABE' are a part of this process.

If basic skills teaching is to survive as part of any college curriculum and structure, then basic skills tutors have to accept innovation and change as inevitable. Most colleges are attempting to move away from a course based structure to one which is more learner-centred and flexible. This has implications for all college staff, and basic skills tutors. Learning support, with its offer of improved access, is a part of this flexible, learner-centred, structure.

Conclusions

The foregoing constitutes part of a piece of action research. It has been adapted to omit any reference to action research as this did not seem appropriate for this medium. The focus was upon spelling as a skill to be learnt like any other skill. As a skill it is best learnt initially in isolation, by a process of over-learning. A short spelling course provided a good medium for this. Once the skill, how to learn spellings, has been mastered or over learned, then it is desirable to incorporate this skill into subject areas.

The spelling programme detailed here could be incorporated into other courses. It is most useful for students who have real difficulty in learning spellings by any other means. It is a structured approach which they can understand and contribute to. If students are to continue to use the programme then time needs to be built into courses to allow them to practise the newly acquired skill. This has already started to happen on a small scale within basic skills classes at this college. Students did progress from the short spelling course to courses allowing them to study towards a Wordpower Certificate or a GCSE qualification.

As stated earlier, many students have difficulty in acquiring the skill of spelling. This may be because of dyslexia, either mild or more pronounced, or specific spelling difficulties, which is a persistent inability to learn how to spell. What is certain, however, is that Examination Boards, Government legislators, LEA's, College Lecturers, School Teachers, parents, students and last, but certainly not least, exmployers, have an interest in conventional spelling. ■

THE SPRINGBOARD PROJECT

Sian Whiteley is ESOL tutor organiser at Park House, an outreach centre of North Warwickshire College. In this article she describes a model for industrial liaison, which worked well.

A small scale development grant was awarded to the College by Warwickshire County Council from the Post 19 development fund for the establishment of a project supporting ESOL clients onto Employment Training and accessing clients into work or onto other courses offering further accreditation. An associate lecturer was appointed to manage the project, supported by three Bilingual Liaison Officers and the other members of the staff team at the Centre.

Although the project was for six months only, beginning in September 1990, the lessons learned and the information gathered has had a far reaching effect on the overall provision of the centre, and the training and support on offer for both ESOL clients and those requiring help in basic skills.

The grant allowed for staffing, resources and travel. Our first priority was to build up a resource bank to enhance the delivery of Numberpower and Wordpower, which had been added to our existing accreditation programmes. Practical equipment for Numberpower had been begged and borrowed in the past. We were now able to buy most of the equipment required. Resources was also purchased to enhance the literacy and job search scheme.

Clients were drawn from existing courses and from referrals by Training Managers.

The Project Manager together with the Bilingual Liaison workers then began speaking to factories and industry in general in the area to ascertain what the real situation regarding vacancies was, what they were and more importantly what their actual requirements regarding levels of literacy, numeracy and English were. They also sought to find out what training was available. This was time consuming as the Project Manager also had a full teaching programme.

The area we serve has been particularly affected by the recession and unemployment is very high. It was discovered, not surprisingly that 16-17 year old trainees were more likely to be taken on than those in the 25-45 age bracket. However, armed with information about which areas were recruiting workers and what skills were needed, individual programmes were devised for clients, offering a choice of modules which included English for the workplace – spoken and written – numeracy, job-seeking skills, personal effectiveness, keyboarding and Initial Training for those needing to build confidence before moving on to the other areas of training. All programmes offered accreditation if required.

Those already on Employment Training were found work placements and attended the Centre for one day per week for support in their work. Others were able to attend the Main College site for tasters in a variety of areas such as motor vehicle, welding, industrial sewing.

An adult Careers Adviser was also invaluable in contributing to the programme. By working with the Bilingual Liaison officers she helped with careers advice, job opportunities and aspects of further training on an individual basis as required, and also in group situations.

Links with the Job Centre, Benefit office, Social Services and Training Managers in the area were strengthened. Print-outs of job vacancies from the Job Centre were invaluable for Job Search groups and regular meetings of the Unemployment Network, a group with representatives from all agencies supporting unemployed adults, kept information up to date and was an excellent vehicle for our own publicity.

When sympathetic employers were found, liaison workers were able to accompany clients to interviews to assist in translation and form-filling where required, especially for those who had the manual skills suitable for the job but who still lacked confidence in the use of English.

Formative and summative assessments were already in place at the Centre for other programmes. These were included in the Springboard Project and formed the basis for a portfolio which could be taken to prospective employers. References, C.V.'s, certificates and information on courses taken were also included. A Health and Safety Project was instigated for all clients as this was an important requirement of all employers.

As several of our clients were interested in setting up their own business, a short four week course in basic business skills was also offered.

Through this project, clients were able to gain confidence and new skills in a non-threatening, supportive environment working at their own pace and level.

The outcomes were:

- 36 clients found employment (full or part-time)
- 53 progressed to E.T. or further training
- 32 achieved accreditation – RSA, Oxford or City & Guilds
- 2 set up their own business.

The provision set up for this project has now been assimilated into the ABE and ESOL provision of the Centre and is available to every client. More are working towards accreditation and moving on to further training, including teacher training and NVQ courses. Last year enrolment was up by 20% and the indications so far are that it will be even higher this year. ■

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CONFERENCE '92 GLAZIERS HALL 29 SEPTEMBER

'We are doubtful about using 'output related funding' to improve effectiveness. Too often it punishes students and potential students for poor provision; it does little to motivate or reward effort and encourages an 'education as a learning factory' view . . .'

Alan Wells, Director, ALBSU

'It is clear that an organisation cannot become an Investor in People if it ignores the basic skills needs of its workforce.'

Rt. Hon. Gillian Shephard MP, Secretary of State for Employment

'One of the primary things that I see ALBSU as is the independent voice, the organisation that will speak out for people who need our help. We are trying to make sure that the voice of adult literacy and basic skills is well heard.'

Peter Davis, Chairman, ALBSU

'The inter-agency work is particularly important because it does emphasise that basic skills needs involve a whole range of agencies and organisations. You can't pigeon-hole basic skills in one department or another. They cross all boundaries, they cross all types of occupation . . .'

HRH The Princess Royal, Patron, ALBSU

'Change is the milieu in which we all have to operate. But very often in thinking about change people and organisations tend to look backwards with regret and nostalgia. I think that what we've proven today is the ability of ALBSU to take change and use it as the milieu in which we can look forward . . .'

Ruth Gee, Vice Chair, ALBSU

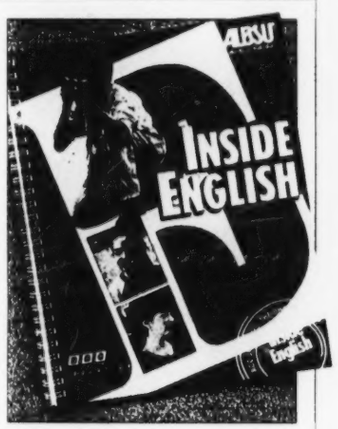
'You can imagine the impact if you move to a family literacy approach where you say let's don't do pre-school education over here and 30 years later basic skills and never the two shall meet. Rather let's take the power of inter-generational transfer from parent to child.'

Tom Sticht, President, The ABCs, California

'The Council is concerned above all with stability for next year and is not looking to colleges or local education authorities to disrupt existing patterns of provision. Our guidelines will be intended to promote and build on collaboration and to sustain the co-operation between providers that results in progression and coherence for students.'

William Stubbs, Chief Executive, Further Education Funding Council

Information



Inside English

This workbook accompanies the BBC Education TV series *Inside English* but can be used independently by anyone wishing to improve their functional English for work and study. It is particularly useful for ESOL students who have a basic understanding of English and want to develop their skills further.

The chapters contain tasks and tips (plus references to Wordpower competences) and focus on the following communication skills:

- talking about yourself
- making a case
- negotiating
- using technical language
- making choices
- handling clients
- taking part in a meeting
- giving a talk

Published in association with BBC Education and Equality At Work, Blackburn College.

ISBN 1 870741 5 01

£4.95 plus postage

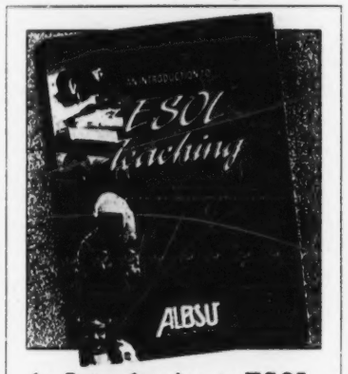
Viewpoints 14

New Perspectives on the Teaching of ESOL

The latest issue of *Viewpoints* reviews present practice in the teaching of ESOL and includes articles on the EFL/ESOL relationship, pronunciation, home tuition and the importance of initial assessment for ESOL students.

ISSN 0 266 20989

£1.85 plus postage



An Introduction to ESOL Teaching

by Jane Jordan

This essential handbook is designed to support new ESOL tutors who are working towards the City & Guilds Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills (ESOL 9284). It outlines a wide range of ESOL teaching methods and includes helpful information on resource materials, books for further reading and a comprehensive glossary.

ISBN 1 870741 48 X

£3.25 plus postage

The ALBSU Standards for Basic Skills Students and Trainees

These ALBSU Standards have been used to design nationally recognised qualifications for basic skills students and trainees and describe how individuals use communication and numeracy skills and how their competency in these skills can be assessed. The Standards can be customised to any individual learner and can be used to monitor progress, to set attainment targets or to provide a perspective on job or task analysis.

ISBN 1 870741 47 1

£9.00 plus postage

New Publications List

The new ALBSU Publications List is now available free of charge from the Unit. It provides information about all of our published material, including books, packs, readers, videos, reports, leaflets and posters, plus details of how to order.

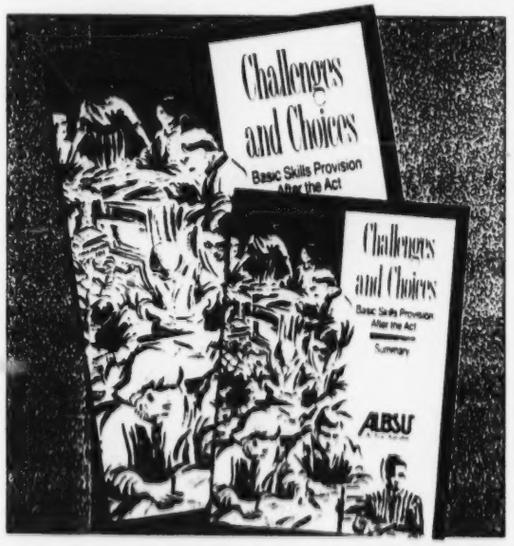
Challenges & Choices

Basic Skills After the Act

Challenges & Choices will be of particular interest to LEAs and colleges of further education. It includes advice on the definition and parameters of basic skills work and outlines the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to the management and organisation of provision in the light of the Further & Higher Education Act 1992. It also suggests ways of funding and describes some indicators of performance which could be used for assessing the performance of basic skills programmes.

ISBN 1 870741 52 8

Individual copies of the Booklet and the Summary are available free of charge from ALBSU.



These two new videos, commissioned by ALBSU and presented by TV personality, Carol Vorderman, are an exciting new way to improve spelling and letter writing skills. They are designed for all ages so that both parents and children can learn at home, alone or together. Full of tips to avoid common pitfalls, these videos are presented in easy-to-follow sections and lessons can be rewound and watched again until the learner is ready to move on. .

Available as part of Carol Vorderman's already hugely successful *Video Class* series, copies can be bought from high street retailers such as WH Smith and Woolworths or direct from ALBSU.

A Survey of Literacy & Numeracy Students

This year ALBSU undertook a survey of literacy and numeracy students in England and Wales. A similar survey had been undertaken at the time of the adult literacy campaign in the mid-1970s and, although local surveys have been undertaken since, another national survey was needed. The initial work on constructing the survey was undertaken, under contract, by NIACE.

Information was obtained on almost 10,000 adult literacy and numeracy students in England and Wales from a representative sample of 22 LEAs and 1 voluntary organisation. Information was not obtained on ESOL students, although we may undertake a similar survey of ESOL users in the next year or two depending on available resources. The findings focus on the differences of basic skills students in terms of:

- gender
- age
- employment status
- means of referral to a basic skills programme
- length of time spent in a basic skills programme
- reasons for leaving a basic skills programme.

The findings of this survey provide a useful insight into the general characteristics of basic skills students in England and Wales and help to give a picture of people currently in basic skills provision.

A free booklet summarising these findings is available from ALBSU.

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ALLIED STEEL AND WIRE

A development project with employers

Philippa Williams, co-ordinator of a TEED sponsored project designed to 'promote Word-power and Numberpower amongst employees and trainees', outlines approaches to marketing and promotion and gives a case study of work with one large employer – Allied Steel and Wire. The project was based at The Friary, South Glamorgan.

Despite current unemployment figures, the UK's workforce is set to shrink over the next decade and industry will increasingly be looking to promote from within. Some employees who could be promoted lack the basic skills needed to perform the more complex tasks promotion may demand.

With this in mind The Friary Community Education Centre in Cardiff collaborated with South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council in Spring 1991 to apply for a National Development Fund project to 'promote the use of Wordpower and Numberpower amongst employees and trainees' in the area. Work commenced on the project in September 1991. The certificates were publicised as a 'progression route to National Vocational Qualifications' (NVQs).

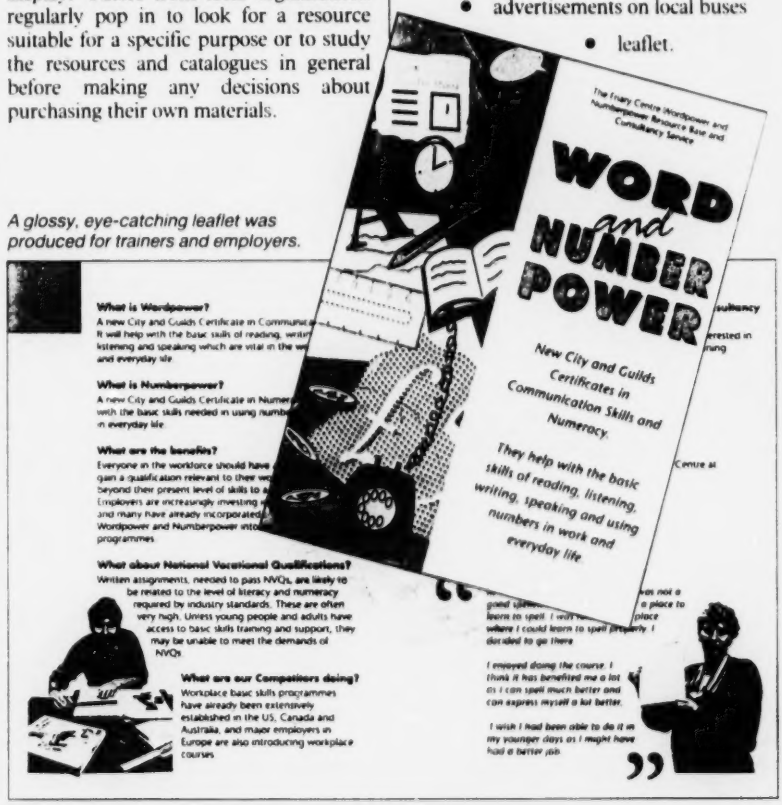
Our first priority was to set up and promote a Resource Base and Consultancy Service where those responsible for training within industry and in training companies could meet with experienced tutors to discuss the certificates and examine resources. For the period of the project, this service was free. However when the project funding finished in April 1992, other arrangements had to be made.

A room has been set aside at The Friary where these resources are permanently on display. Tutors from local organisations regularly pop in to look for a resource suitable for a specific purpose or to study the resources and catalogues in general before making any decisions about purchasing their own materials.

Marketing

We promoted the service in a number of ways including:

- local radio
- regional supplement in national press
- local press
- advertisements on local buses
- leaflet.


The Friary Centre (Wordpower and Numberpower Resource Base and Consultancy Service
WORD and NUMBER POWER
New City and Guilds Certificates in Communication Skills and Numeracy.
They help with the basic skills of reading, listening, writing, speaking and using numbers in work and everyday life.
What is Wordpower?
What is Numberpower?
What are the benefits?
What about National Vocational Qualifications?
What are our Competitors doing?
Workplace basic skills programmes have already been extensively established in the US, Canada and Australia, and major employers in Europe are also introducing workplace courses.

A glossy, eye-catching leaflet was produced for trainers and employers.

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The Leaflet

Some of the funding was used to produce a glossy, eye-catching leaflet designed to have a long shelf-life and to be attractive to both trainers and employers *and* to those who needed the training.

Target list

We needed to reach the right audience quickly, and to raise the public's awareness of Wordpower and Numberpower and what they were all about. So, in addition to the aforementioned marketing methods, we drew up a target list of approximately 250 local outlets. These included:

- Local TV, radio and press
- Local industry newsletters
  - Training and Enterprise Council (TEC)
  - Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
  - Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise (Cardiff Vale)
- TEC board members
- Kompass Directory entries
- Local training providers
- Contacts suggested by Friary tutors from experience in outreach groups, etc
- Ideas from advertisements and articles in local and national press
- Yellow Pages entries.

We circulated information about Wordpower and Numberpower and 'dangled a carrot' of funding being available to set up a number of pilot schemes delivering Wordpower and/or Numberpower as part of vocational training.

The training providers responded quickly – their enthusiasm probably boosted by the announcement that TEED (the Training Enterprise and Education Division of the Department of Employment – Welsh Office in our area) would be paying Output Related Funding for Foundation Level Wordpower and Numberpower.

Other replies came from the following areas:

- Allied Steel and Wire
- Construction
- Hairdressing
- Hotel and Catering
- Job Centres
- Local Councils
- Probation Service
- Regional Railways
- South Glamorgan Area Health Authority
- Supermarkets.

Awareness Raising Day

To meet the demand for further information and advice on setting up groups, the Project Co-ordinator visited many organisations or invited those interested to attend the Resource Base and Consultancy Service.

An 'awareness-raising day' was also arranged which was filled to capacity. The day consisted of a series of workshops with lots of 'hands-on' sessions illustrating how to fit Wordpower or Numberpower into other training, particularly NVQ Level II in various occupations. Wordpower students based at The Friary welcomed delegates and showed them around the building – and were being assessed for various elements of Wordpower Units 010 (conversing with one other person) and 011 (conversing with more than one person) at the same time!

The Pilot Schemes

Three pilot schemes were set up:

1. In The Friary's own 'Step Up' provision (known nationally as Initial Training – for unemployed adults who have no clear idea of the type of work they want or who have literacy, numeracy, oral or motivational needs which are hampering their search for employment).
2. In Alberto's Academy of Hairdressing and Beauty.
3. In Allied Steel and Wire.

We thought it would be interesting to include a case study illustrating our experiences with one of these pilots, Allied Steel and Wire.

Case Study – Allied Steel and Wire

Allied Steel and Wire (ASW) was one of the companies on our target list. It is a well-known and respected local employer with a workforce of over 2,000. It offers a wide variety of in-house and NVQ training to their employees.

ASW has recently undergone major internal reorganisation and rationalisation. As a result of this, the management are endeavouring to identify potential 'team leaders' in many sections of the company. The Iron and Steel Trade Confederation is represented at ASW and many employees are members – some have taken on the responsibilities of union representatives and others simply want to get the most out of their union. On health and safety courses run at ASW it was felt that some employees, who clearly had the required knowledge, were not obtaining certificates because they could not transfer this knowledge onto paper.

A courtesy call following the initial mail shot came at an ideal moment. Dr Bob Walker, Head of Training at ASW, had identified the need for basic skills training amongst his workforce in South Glamorgan and was looking for ways to meet this need.

The numeracy need was already being addressed by a member of ASW's training staff who, as well as being involved with in-house and NVQ training, was running a purpose-built introduction to numeracy course to help employees keen to undertake vocational training.

During our first meeting at ASW we explained the format of Wordpower and Numberpower and illustrated how they were similar in structure to National Vocational Qualifications. Dr Walker is involved with writing NVQs for Steel Operatives and was therefore familiar with the terms 'performance criteria', 'unit', 'range statement', etc. We used a questionnaire drawn up by Friary tutors and the project co-ordinator to obtain information which would help us pair up a suitable Friary tutor with a shadow tutor from ASW. (Copies of this questionnaire are available from The Friary).

After a couple of months planning, it was agreed that a Wordpower group would be held on Tuesday afternoons between 1.00pm and 3.00pm. The group was to be held at the Training Centre on ASW's main site where the majority of training takes place. The Friary tutor attended this group together with Mrs Pat Hyett from ASW who had been chosen as the group tutor. This combination of an experienced Wordpower tutor on the one hand and someone familiar with the operation of ASW on the other proved a winning formula!

ASW agreed to undertake the task of recruiting suitable employees for the Tuesday afternoon group. Training staff duly contacted the personnel managers from the various companies within ASW and they in turn spread the word and identified 'volunteers' to join the pilot group. Soon six employees had come forward and the group was ready for 'take off' . . . . and take off it did! What it lacked, at times, in numbers, it made up for ten-fold in enthusiasm!

Employees can join at any time, they are made to feel at home and given the opportunity to settle in before any thought is given to which stage of Wordpower would be most useful to them. The tutor and employee decide this in a number of ways:

1. Using the ALBSU Basic Skills Assessment Pack
2. Looking at work produced by the employee, e.g. letters or reports done at work
3. Discussing what the employee needs to help him do his job more efficiently, to work towards promotion, etc.

Wherever possible, work-related materials are used and in some instances employees may opt to do a Record of Achievement in Wordpower rather than the full certificate if they are keen to brush up in a certain area.

Infectious Enthusiasm!

Keith is a Rail Operations Controller in the Transport Department at ASW. He joined the Wordpower group because he needed to write reports for his job and was finding difficulties expressing himself on paper.

His tutors comment,

'He never fails to supply us with material. He is striving to abandon his verbose style and improve his formal letter and report writing skills. His enthusiasm is infectious; he regularly takes work home and is a delight to work with.'

In order to prevent this problem re-occurring, We Must develop a safe working practice, below I list My recommendations:

a, No Contractor should start work on any of A.S.W.'s tracks without the consent of the duty Controller.
b, No contractor should take possession of a track without signing a possession order with the rail operations Manager.
c, Any possession orders, scotched points or track faults be listed on both the Crew's and the Controller's notice board.
d, A list of all roads that are out of order be handed to the shunters at the start of each shift.
e, In order to prevent wagons being stored on a road that is out of order, we should insist that the platelayers scotch all points away from the affected roads.

Part of Keith's recommendations for new procedures in his derailment report

On one occasion, Keith told the tutors he was enjoying learning again so much that he did 16 hours' homework!

Originally, he intended working towards a Record of Achievement in Wordpower Stage III, Unit 019 – Communicating in Writing. He has been writing reports, letters and poetry on a variety of topics varying from the building of a fictitious sports complex near his home town to the derailment of a locomotive at ASW. As a result of the derailment report, new procedures have been put into place at ASW to avoid similar incidents.

He has improved his report writing skills dramatically and has enjoyed learning again so much that he has now decided to work towards the certificate as a whole.

"Wordpower is all about basic reading, writing and spelling"

Stephen, another group member, had already attended an ABE evening class but with family and work commitments found it difficult to attend regularly. The Wordpower group at ASW was ideal for him – he can now attend in the daytime either before, during or after his shift. Managers are willing to release employees to attend for 2 hours provided alternative cover can be found. It works out typically that one week out of three an employee is attending during shift time, rather than his own time. Stephen is working towards a complete Wordpower Stage I certificate.

He recently contributed the following to the ASW newsletter:

'Wordpower is all about basic reading, writing and spelling. In other words, all the things you learnt at school but may have forgotten through lack of practice. I find the class very enjoyable, with no pressure, enabling me to work at my own pace.'

Stephen's tutors comment:

'He is steadily working towards certification in Wordpower as a whole. He has already been complimented by his line manager upon the improvement in his level of confidence in work and he has no inhibitions about telling workmates of his studying.'

Summer 1992, Issue 1

Training Newsletter

WORDPOWER

Writing letters? Filling in forms? Making lists? Going to meetings?

We all have to do things like this at some time or other, but sometimes it's pretty hard going and we give up or hand the job to someone else.

But wait! The Training Department can help you thanks to WORDPOWER*. This is a new way of helping adults who would like to brush up on their reading, writing and talking skills. Even if you are quite happy in those departments, you can aim at an all round improvement of your communication skills.

If you can find just two hours each week, you can get started on a course which consists of tasks based on subjects which interest **you**. When you finish one task you can move on to another, and eventually there is a qualification. There's no exam, and you can take as long as you like getting there.

Some people who work at Somerset Wire and the Transport Department have already started, and they are getting a lot out of it. There are no fixed terms for WORDPOWER, so you can join them at any time.

Interested? Then get in touch with Pat Hyett in the Training Department.

WORDPOWER is the name for the City & Guilds Certificate in Communication Skills.

Promoting Wordpower in ASW's Newsletter.

Once again, his enthusiasm has proved catching and one of his colleagues has joined the group directly as a result of Stephen's encouragement. This new member is as keen as Stephen to spread the word and an interesting snowball effect is taking place.

The way forward

Once the ASW Wordpower group was established, the Friary tutor's involvement was phased out and finished in August 1992. She had spent a great deal of time explaining to the ASW tutor how Wordpower could be used in relation to work-based materials. The two tutors made several visits to the Resource Base and Consultancy Service at The Friary to assist ASW in selecting resources to purchase for their Wordpower group. The group has, in fact, developed into a workshop which is open every Tuesday afternoon between 12 noon and 5pm. It is hoped this increased flexibility will encourage more employees to take advantage of the opportunity.

In addition to her involvement with the workshop, the ASW tutor is actively promoting Wordpower throughout the company and recruiting new group members. She is doing an excellent job and her methods include the following:

- roving exhibition
- Wordpower handout placed in strategic areas of the company
- students making regular contributions to ASW newsletters
- attending 'employee conferences' to give presentations
- meeting with staff development officers in the various companies within ASW to explain what Wordpower is all about
- encouraging current group members to promote Wordpower through word of mouth.

ASW realise it may take some time for numbers to grow. The methods it is using to promote the workshop have prevented any stigma being attached to Wordpower. Indeed one employee *and* his supervisor attend the group together. Employees as far apart as Sheffield and Kent have heard about the Wordpower Workshop in their Cardiff branch and are keen to take part in something similar.

Where does Numberpower fit in?

ASW is hoping to replace its 'Introduction to Numeracy' courses with a Numberpower workshop. A City and Guilds certificate in Numberpower may give employees the added incentive they need to return to learning. So far, Mr Bob Williams has held an introductory session and we eagerly await news of progress.

Conclusions

We have learnt a great deal about the need for 'basic skills' in the workplace from our experience at ASW. We now have a far clearer understanding of how work-based groups need to:

- be accessible to employees with a wide range of basic skills needs
- be promoted in such a way that employees do not feel they are being 'picked on'
- fit in around shift work
- have a good selection of work-related resources to hand.

One important advantage work-based skills training has over evening classes, outreach groups, etc., is that the workshop runs continually with no long breaks between terms. Progress is therefore easier to maintain and build upon.

ASW's tutor has, as a direct result of the original Wordpower group, become involved with:

- setting up training for employees on health and safety courses who need to learn examination techniques
- running a report-writing day for graduates joining the company as part of their induction process (Wordpower Stage III is proving most useful here)
- designing a course for those facing retirement, etc., to help them fill in forms, write letters, know their rights, etc.
- liaising with ASW employees in Kent and Sheffield who have expressed an interest in Wordpower
- assisting administration staff to obtain vocational qualifications using Wordpower as a starting point.

ASW has been most supportive of The Friary's endeavours to set up work-based basic skills training in South Glamorgan. They welcome tutors from other organisations who wish to visit their workshop to see how it is run. They field speakers at events held to train workplace tutors. They allow us to use their work-related resources in our materials workshop.

We feel the partnership between ASW and ourselves has been of equal value to both organisations – ASW is meeting the basic skills need it had identified and The Friary is now able to use ASW as a model when setting up other basic skills in the workplace programmes.

The full report

As part of this TEED funded project a full report has been produced by the Project Co-ordinator which explains the project in detail – the initial marketing methods used, the three pilot schemes, 'training the trainers' using the City and Guilds Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills (9282/3), etc. If you would like a copy of this report, please contact Philippa Williams at The Friary Centre, The Friary, Cardiff CF1 4AA. ■

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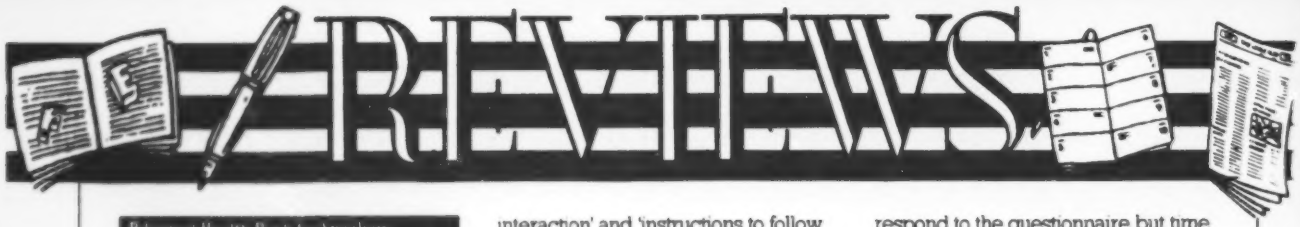

Bilingual Health Pack for Speakers of Bengali

Produced by ESOL Department, Northamptonshire LEA

Available from ESOL Department, Military Road Centre, Military Road, Northampton NN1 3ET

Price: The whole pack (3 booklets and 12 tapes) – £35.00 plus £3.00 p&p.
Individual language packs (1 booklet and 4 tapes) – £12.50 plus £1.50 p&p

No ISBN

Northamptonshire ESOL has produced bilingual health packs for their home tuition scheme. These packs can also be used in the classroom situation at elementary and post elementary levels. They have been produced in Bengali, Gujarati and Cantonese. Each pack comes with a booklet and four tapes. In addition, each language pack has some social interaction phrases and instructions to follow when learning English.

The *Bilingual Health Pack for Speakers of Bengali* consists of four bilingual cassettes and a spiral bound A4 booklet. The situations covered are the predictable ones on 'Making an appointment', 'In the Doctor's surgery', 'Changing an appointment' and 'Making an emergency call for the Doctor to visit at home'.

The book is divided into two parts, each covering two situations, and each section is followed by a list of social interaction phrases and instructions to follow when learning English. The spiral binding makes the book easy to handle and the text is clear and well spaced on the pages. Although the Bengali script is not typeface it is nevertheless well written but the formal level of the spoken Bengali translation makes it less 'user friendly' than one would wish. The instructions for how to use the tape would have been clearer to the listener if the sentences had been shorter.

There is no indication in the pack of the expected level of the Bengali user and we presume from the content that s/he would need to be of at least intermediate level. However, even at that level, the pace of the tapes is still fairly fast and would require a lot of stopping and starting of the tape in order to obtain maximum comprehension.

It is unfortunate that in places the text and the tape do not match together and although a useful addition, the phrases for 'social interaction' and 'instructions to follow when learning English' appear to be simply bolted on and do not have any introduction or explanation.

In view of the dearth of bilingual material the pack is welcomed as a useful addition to the resource shelves of the self access workshop or to use initially in a one to one situation with a home tutor and then left as guided homework, but not we feel as suggested on the pack, for a student to learn English at home on their own.

Jean Brown & Gita Saha
English Language Service
Leicestershire Education Authority

ESOL Materials Database: a list of resources for teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Compiled and edited by Helen Sunderland

Available from Language and Literacy Unit, Southwark College, Asylum Road, London SE15 2RJ

Price: Paper version (arranged alphabetically or by subject) – £10.00 inc. p&p
On 3½" disc (Microsoft Works Version 2.0) – £10.00 inc. p&p

No ISBN

This Database has been compiled on the basis of 125 returned questionnaires (out of a total of 700 sent out) and visits to resource centres and ESOL schemes.

The following information, if available, is given about each resource: title, author, series, publisher, supplier, pages, paperback or hardback, price, date of publication, ISBN, category, number of recommendations, comments. The resources are assigned to these categories: 1. Reference, 2. Readers and reading materials, 3. Practical teaching books: (a) course books, (b) packs, (c) games and roleplay, (d) listening/pronunciation, 4. Language, race, culture, 5. Self Access, 6. Tutor reference/training, 7. Language support/ESP. In addition there is an index of series and publishers' addresses.

At first glance this seems a comprehensive and useful guide to ESOL Materials but on closer examination there are a number of flaws in it. Unfortunately the potential of such a Database has not been fully realised and the result is idiosyncratic and patchy.

It is a pity that more centres did not respond to the questionnaire but time was obviously a factor. Some of the gaps here could perhaps have been filled by asking for centres' resource lists, less time-consuming than filling in a questionnaire.

The subtitle is a more accurate description of the contents than the title as it is not only a Database of ESOL materials but also of EFL, literacy and numeracy materials used by ESOL teachers.

The version reviewed is arranged alphabetically by title. This is frustrating to use and results in a lot of searching through. You have to know the title to find the book. This is all right if you just want to check the publisher or price of a familiar book, but surely most users are looking for titles available under a certain category. The quotes used in the introduction explaining the background to the Database reflect this. 'Do you know of any good readers?' 'What can I use for language awareness training?' To find books in a particular category necessitates a hunt through the whole Database. Fortunately, it is also available arranged in subject categories, so make sure you get that version.

The background quotes also ask: 'Which EFL textbooks are suitable for use in ESOL classes?' 'Are there any literacy materials that would be useful in ESOL classes?' However, the entries do not say whether the resources are EFL or literacy – you have to guess. The questions go unanswered.

Sometimes the information is incomplete when it would not seem to be difficult to have obtained it from other catalogues. It would be useful, in addition, to be given some information about the content of the resources. The lack of comments for most titles means that there is little to help in assessing the usefulness of the resource, apart from, perhaps the number of recommendations. This, however, may not be a reliable way of doing this, as the number of recommendations may reflect the availability of the resource rather than its quality. This is certainly true of more recently produced resources which may be good but not yet widely used. As the compilers rightly say, the paucity of specifically ESOL materials is noticeable and is reflected in the large number of recommendations they get. The small number of recommenda-

tions for some EFL titles does not necessarily indicate, as the compilers think, that there is little to choose between them, but that there are many more titles to choose from.

It is infuriating that so many of the resources recommended are 'Out of Print'; 65 out of 600. While some of these are good and still worth remembering a process of selection could have been made. It is all right for those who have access to a resource base where these titles are available but no good for someone wanting to set up a new one. At times the quest for comprehensiveness overcomes critical selectivity. Why recommend an out-of-date, EFL book like 'Present Day English for Foreign Students' (E.F. Candlin) published in 1962!

It seems churlish to be so negative about this Database when so much work has obviously been put into it. It certainly contains a wide-ranging and comprehensive list of titles with few noticeable omissions (we could not find the Leamington Spa packs). As the Database can be added to and, perhaps, amended, we should like to suggest that a format similar to publishers' catalogues would be preferable: i.e. resources listed according to categories with a contents page of the categories, a brief outline of content, new resources highlighted (especially ESOL ones), ESOL/EFL/Literacy differentiated within the categories, an index listing titles and, perhaps, authors alphabetically. Restrict Out of Print entries to those that are highly recommended and still useful.

The Database is helpful in drawing attention to gaps in ESOL materials. This might stimulate someone to try and fill them! It is worth mentioning here that the gap in language support materials is starting to be filled by, for example, 'Go to work on your English' NEC, a vocationally based open learning series. There are also materials being developed by the 'Language Network' based at Shipley College, although the circulation of these is restricted to member colleges.

Despite the reservations expressed above, this list of resources, organised according to category, could be a useful reference for ESOL providers.

Carole Crompton, Jane Jordan
Stockport ESOL Unit

Writing in the Community: An International Survey of Research and Theory – Volume 6

Edited by David Barton and Roz Ivanic

Published by Sage Publications, 6 Bonhill Street, London EC2A 4PU

Price: Hardback £34.00; Paperback £15.95 p&p 10% extra

ISBN 0 803 936 338

This interesting collection of nine chapters by different authors is aimed at a diverse audience, including community workers and researchers as well as teachers of writing.

Although essentially an academic book rather than a practical manual, several of the chapters are of relevance to the ABE tutor and the general ethos is sympathetic to basic skills. This fact alone is enough to recommend parts of it as general reading for those involved in basic skills who wish to keep up to date with current thinking on 'functional literacy' and for sociolinguists who wish to advance their own professional development. In view of the breadth of material covered the remainder of this review is confined to those chapters which said something to me as a tutor/trainer.

'Roles, Networks and Values in Everyday Writing' is a most relevant contribution to our understanding of what is meant by 'functional literacy', detailing as it does the results of an investigation into the actual writing carried out by a group of adults in their everyday lives. I had hoped that 'Community Publishing as Self-Education' would provide me with practical hints about the possible ways of publishing students' writing other than the home-made desktop efforts for private circulation. I was disappointed to find that it starts at a more sophisticated level and the nitty-gritty I had hoped for was absent.

'Learning to Write as an Adult' had some fascinating insights in the excerpts from interviews with students about their writing. Finally, 'Bringing Community Writing Practices into Education' has some pertinent comments about the differences between community writing, school writing and self-generated writing. It challenges establishment-style assumptions about what are appropriate standards and styles of writing and raises questions about conventional educational attitudes.

Ann Finlay
Basic Skills Tutor/Trainer
Nottinghamshire Education Authority

Numberpower (Foundation) Support Materials for the Certificate in Numeracy (3794)

by Anne Tompsett and Julie Fairhead

Published by Surrey County Council

Available from Avanti Books, 8 Parsons Green, Boulton Road, Pin Green Industrial Estate, Stevenage SG1 4QG

Price: £27.90 plus £4.11 p&p

No ISBN

For those numeracy tutors who have either already embarked on Numberpower accreditation or are considering it, this pack provides a very useful bank of support material. Anne Tompsett and Julie Fairhead have used their experience in Adult Basic Education classes in Surrey to devise a set of worksheets and stimulus material that run parallel to the structure in the Numberpower units and elements at Foundation level. Here it may be seen as a companion to the ALBSU Crediting Numeracy Pack. Together they provide a wealth of material for tutoring numeracy students at this level.

The worksheets are clearly presented in the context of real life situations. They follow the seven units of the Foundation level – 'Using Money in Everyday Situations'; 'Planning the Use of Money and Time'; 'Measuring Lengths and Calculating Areas'; 'Measuring Weights and Volumes'; 'Setting and Planning Timing Activities'; 'Giving and Following Directions' and finally, 'Reporting Numerical and Graphical Information'.

However, this pack goes further to suggest combinations of worksheets into topic areas such as 'Giving a Party', 'Decorating', 'Selling Up', etc. This enables a more fluid structure and a more interesting approach. Some points to be aware of, however, are a need for tutors to guide students in acquisition and practice in mathematical skills. Practice at skills is needed to instill confidence and

perhaps there should be more emphasis on this in the pack. In addition, some of the sheets are a little redundant by making suggestions that could be more easily given in a spoken form by the tutor. There is perhaps an over emphasis on everything being presented on worksheets – students may become inundated with unnecessary paper. Tutors should be encouraged to have a dialogue with students out of which their interests and experiences can guide further activities.

It should, however, be said that this pack provides a useful addition with some ingenious ideas.

Ros Arnold
Numeracy Tutor
Stockport Education Authority

Telling Tales: A Collection of Short Stories, Poetry and Drama

Various Authors

Published by The Gatehouse Publishing Charity Ltd, Birley Centre, Chichester Road, Manchester M15 5FU.

Price: £4.95 inc. p&p

ISBN 0 906253 349

'Telling Tales' is a paperback collection of stories, poetry and plays written by writers from adult basic education schemes. A brief autobiography and photograph accompanies each writer's work. Many of the authors explain what writing is like for them or how they came to write their particular piece. Each story, poem or play is concluded by questions for the reader, to promote and encourage further thought.

Layout and the size and style of the typeface is good and clear; some of the text is line-broken. All of this enables the stories to be accessible to readers at many levels.

This is no ordinary book, however. In addition to the obvious care and thought that has gone into the layout and presentation of the material, the stories, plays and poems are a delight to read. This book has to be a must for any individual or group interested in developing their writing and a wonderful book to read aloud with students. There is a wealth of styles and ideas for tutors and students within its pages. As well as encouraging reading and writing on an individual or group basis, it is a reminder to us all that 'beginning writers or readers are not beginning thinkers'.

Heather Clary
County ABE Development Worker
Cambridgeshire Education Authority

Phrases

by Hugh and Margaret Brown

Published by Brown and Brown Publishing, Keeper's Cottage, Westward, Wigton, Cumbria CA7 8NQ

Price: £1.95 inc. p&p

ISBN 1 870 596 34X

This is the type of book with which even the most basic student can identify. Every phrase in the book has been used by us all at some time or other. Just one phrase can produce a host of communication skills. The authors have taken some 250 well-known catch phrases, cliches and proverbs and sorted them into easily recognisable sections. Each section on its own is an exercise in itself, testing the reader, providing much 'food for thought', giving information and asking questions. Fortunately there is also an answer section at the back of the book which helped solve many an argument in our unit.

What the book does best is open up to the student and tutor the opportunity to suggest additional phrases within a particular section which the author may have deliberately omitted for just this purpose. The exercises prove therefore to be of interest to students over a broad range of ability and cover everything from 'cloze procedure' to 'free hand writing'.

In accordance with Brown & Brown's policy of providing economical resource material, the books are printed using 100% recycled paper. The graphics are simple, black on white, but adequately help to break up each page. Text frames are a useful addition. This book could be a useful addition to any literacy resource library. Dare I say it, I'm sure this book will 'catch on' in your unit!

Len Power
Adult & Continuing Education
Co-ordinator
South Tyneside Education Authority

NOTE:

In Issue 46 of the Newsletter, the 'Handwriting, Reading and Spelling System' produced by Alan Davies was reviewed. Since then we have been advised that the system now comes in a presentation box complete with Course Notes and a Dated Record Card – all of which may be photocopied provided they are not offered for resale. THRASS is available at the new price of £9.99 including p&p.

The ALBSU Newsletter is published four times a year, in November, February, May and July. Copies are available, free, to organisations and individuals. We aim to publish articles of interest to those teaching in adult literacy, second language and basic skills, those who are responsible for funding and organising the provision, and those who are generally interested in these important areas of work.

If you have ideas on topics which you would like to see covered, please contact the Editor, at ALBSU. Reviews of relevant publications are written for the newsletter by practitioners, and we are interested to receive publications which could be useful in basic education.

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, Kingsbourne House, 229/231 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA. Tel: 071-405 4017.

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ALBSU
The Basic Skills Unit

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HELPING ESOL STUDENTS TO IMPROVE THEIR PRONUNCIATION

What do students need to know about sounds, stress, intonation and fluency in order to improve their spoken English? Jane Jordan of the Stockport ESOL Unit outlines the key elements which affect pronunciation and sets out practical advice on teaching and learning strategies.

Sometimes a student's cry for help is 'I want to speak better', 'People don't understand me', or even, as one student said to me recently 'I want to talk posh!' The problem is not *what* to say but *how* to say it.

What is involved in pronunciation?

The elements that need to be addressed to achieve better spoken English are: sounds, stress, intonation and fluency.

Sounds

There are 44 sounds in English: 24 consonant sounds, 12 vowel sounds and 8 diphthongs (2 vowel sounds joined together). The way these sounds are produced depends on such things as the position of the tongue in relation to the lips and teeth, the shape of the mouth and whether the vocal cords are vibrated or not. It is not within the scope of this article to describe the sounds in detail and it is easy to get this information from standard books on pronunciation. Each sound can be represented by a phonetic symbol or, more simply, by a 'key' word, i.e. a short commonly used word which contains the sound, e.g. 'ten' for 'e'.

Stress

Stress is the beat or rhythm of the language. In English one syllable in a word, and some words in a sentence, are stressed more than others. If all syllables are stressed equally the speaker sounds stilted.

The most common word stress pattern is with the strong stress on the first syllable, e.g. student, but with 3 or 4 syllable words the pattern is more variable, e.g. newspaper, computer, engineer. The stress on a word can change when an extra syllable is added, e.g. photograph, photographer.

Sometimes the same word can be stressed in a different way according to its grammatical function. The stress is at the beginning when the word is a noun or adjective and at the end when it is a verb, e.g. 'Our records show improved performance'. 'Can you record this programme, please?' Giving special stress to particular words in a sentence can affect the meaning, e.g. 'She drives a bus' (i.e. not a car), 'She drives a bus' (but he doesn't).

In a sentence the words that have most meaning tend to have strong stress and the small structural words have weak stress.

e.g. They've gone to London to visit some friends.

Weak stress changes the way these words are pronounced.

e.g. 'To' is 'tə' not 'tu:'

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Intonation

This is the tune of the language. The way the voice goes up and down can show that a sentence is ending and the kind of sentence it is. It can show in the spoken language what punctuation can show in the written language. It also shows attitudes and emotions such as surprise, alarm and sarcasm.

The main tunes to be aware of are:

(a) the falling tune at the end of a statement, order, or question-word question, e.g.

'The train has just arrived at Platform 2'.↘

'Do not get on the train yet'.↘

'Where's the buffet?'↘

(b) The rising tune for requests and 'Yes/No' questions:

'Are you ready?↗'

'Could you wait a moment?↗'

The rising tune is also used to listen items except for the last item.

e.g. 'I bought some apples↗, oranges↗, pears↗ and bananas↘.'

It expresses surprise or disbelief:

e.g. 'Really↘! He actually passed his driving test↗!'

Fluency

Fluency does not mean speaking quickly but using sentence stress correctly, making natural word groupings rather than speaking word by word, using contractions such as 'I'll' for 'I will' and merging one word with the next where appropriate, e.g. 'Afterall'.

'(I'll) meet you / in the coffee/ bar when (I've) finished my work'./

Identifying needs

If you want to gear pronunciation practice to the needs of a specific student or group of students there is obviously no point in working through all the sounds of English or all the elements described above.

Listen carefully to the student (it is useful to record her/him) and identify the elements that cause difficulty or cause the student to be misunderstood.

A knowledge of the phonological features of a student's first language, even superficially, is useful here. The areas of difficulty are likely to lie where the first language differs from English, such as sounds which do not exist or are used in different parts of a word. So a Hindi speaker has difficulty distinguishing 'p/b' because there is only one sound in Hindi; Cantonese speakers have problems with the sound 'r' as this does not exist so they substitute 'l'. They also have difficulty with consonant sounds such as 'b', 'd' and 'g' at the end of words as only a few consonants occur at the end of words in Cantonese and these are sounded very lightly. Sometimes the difficulty is an unfamiliar combination of sounds rather than the sounds in isolation. This is particularly true of consonant clusters such as 'st', 'sk', 'str', 'sp' where some speakers tend to insert a vowel sound, e.g. 'sikool' for 'school'.

Different stress and intonation patterns are likely to be transferred to English resulting in a different accent which may cause problems of comprehensibility.

Decide what are the most important aspects to work on. Here a lot depends on the level of students and their aspirations. There is no need to aim at achieving standard English pronunciation. The main criterion is comprehensibility. Students want to be understood when they speak to native English speakers. If they are not, they may be embarrassed and lose the confidence to try again.

How to practise pronunciation skills

As a general rule it is better to build up good pronunciation as an integral part of language teaching or learning. So if you are working with beginners you can encourage clear sound production, correct stress and intonation from the outset. However, students who have already learnt quite a lot of English may, at times, want to focus on specific difficulties as well as pursue an integrated approach. It is also useful to raise students' awareness about pronunciation so they can listen to and imitate native speakers more effectively.

It is usual to practise pronunciation for a few minutes on a regular basis, rather than spend a whole lesson on it. However, if students are particularly interested in this aspect of language, they might enjoy more intensive practice.

In all pronunciation work the first step is discrimination. A student cannot produce a sound, stress pattern or intonation pattern s/he cannot recognise.

Practising sounds

Sounds are only significant when in contrast with other sounds. In other words, if a student pronounces a sound in a word wrongly it only matters if this results in confusion with another word, or if it makes the word incomprehensible. For many speakers the sounds 'th' as in 'the' and 'th' as in 'thin' are difficult to produce and may be replaced by 't', 'd', 's', 'z', but it is rare that this would cause misunderstanding. Usually the context makes it clear which word is intended, e.g. 'It costs th ree pounds.'

However, sometimes confusion can arise between closely related sounds.

'Have you got a pen? pan? pin?'

You therefore need to give students practice in discriminating the sounds that are confused.

To practise discrimination it is usual to pair words which are identical apart from the sounds to be distinguished. These are called minimal pairs, e.g. bin/bean, shop/chop, tin/thin. The student may be able to produce one of the sounds but not the other, or produces a sound somewhere between the two.

First of all demonstrate as far as possible how the two sounds you want the student to distinguish are made. Get her/him to touch the throat to feel the vibration if one of the sounds is voiced (i.e. the vocal cords are vibrated). Exaggerate slightly but do not distort the sound. Watching someone make the sounds can help a student distinguish them at first.

Select a number of pairs as far as possible from words known to the students. It is not the place to introduce new

vocabulary and there is no point in practising with uncommon words students are never likely to use. It can also be difficult to find pairs of common words for some sounds.

Here are some types of exercise:

(a) Say each pair of words and then repeat one of the words and ask students to identify it.

e.g. write/ride mat/mad
cart/card bat/bad

(b) Ask students to listen and identify whether pairs of words are the same or different.

light/light	S
long/wrong	D
light/right	D
wrong/wrong	S

(c) Read a list of words and ask the student to put them in columns according to sound.

	1 (girl)	2 (ball)
shirt, walk, small, skirt, four, work		

(d) When a student can hear the difference between individual words it can be useful to put the words into sentences to practise discrimination in context, but it is not always possible to think of pairs of realistic sentences. Usually, one or two examples are enough.

I walk in the park.
I work in the park.

I'd like some blue shorts, please.
I'd like some blue shirts, please.

The next step is to help students to produce the sounds. Demonstrate the sounds again and ask the student to repeat the sound in isolation first. Then practise the sound in words and in sentences. There is no need to keep to minimal pairs at this stage. Use examples that are relevant and familiar to the students. Remember that some sounds need to be practised in the middle or at the end of words as well as or instead of at the beginning.

However, the production of some incorrect sounds is less likely to make a student difficult to understand than different stress and intonation patterns. If a student has great difficulty with a particular sound it is not worth spending too much time on it. Other aspects of language are more important.

Practising stress

a. Word stress

(i) Listening and identifying.

Ask students to listen to and recognise common word stress patterns.

e.g.	teacher	correct	holiday
	student	repeat	hospital
	paper	again	alphabet

Notice the effect strong or weak stress has on sounds, e.g. student/dentist. Make sure you pronounce the words naturally and that you say them in the same way each time you repeat them. It helps to record material for pronunciation practice to ensure a consistent model.

You can help students hear the stress patterns by beating the rhythm.

(ii) Students repeat the words. It is useful to record students so they can compare their version with the model.

This kind of practice can easily be incorporated into lessons when, for example, introducing new vocabulary.

(b) Sentence stress

This is a very important aspect of pronunciation. Getting this right means that the language has the right rhythm. Again the sequence is listen, identify, repeat.

Start with short sentences or phrases following the same stress pattern and build up to longer ones.

(i) Tell me
Buy it
Show her

(ii) He knows
It's nice
I'm hot

(iii) He's gone to work
I bought some shoes

(iv) Tell me
Tell me about the film
Tell me about the film you saw yesterday

(v) See if students can hear special stress and understand the meaning of it by saying the same sentence in different ways.

I want to see the film on BBC1

I want to see the film on BBC1

I want to see the film on BBC1

Practising intonation

(a) Ask the student to distinguish rising and falling tunes using one word examples:

e.g. No. Me? Right. Who?

Then practise recognition of sentences with falling and rising tunes.

(b) Practise saying sentences which use the falling tune.

e.g. I liked the film.

Who was in it?

I can't remember.

Write it down.

(c) Practise sentences which use the rising tune.

Did you see the film?

Would you like to go to the cinema?

(d) Practise pairs of sentences, one falling and one rising.

(i) He's not coming to the class today.

Is he coming to the class today?

(ii) Finish your work quickly.

Could you finish your work quickly, please?

(e) Practise words and sentences where the intonation changes the meaning, e.g.

Sorry. (apology)

Sorry? (question)

They've arrived. (statement)

They've arrived? (question)

Practising fluency

(a) Practise contractions. 'I've seen them', rather than 'I have seen them.'

Students who have learnt formal English are not used to doing this and it tends to make them sound rather stilted.

It is important, however, that students know what the contraction stands for, especially where there could be confusion, e.g.

I'd (had) finished my work by 7.00pm.

I'd (would) finish my work if I had time.

(b) Practise linking the sound at the end of one word with the sound at the beginning of the next.

e.g. He broke_an_arm_and_a leg.

Sometimes a slight 'y', 'w' or 'r' sound is put in to help glide from one word to the next, e.g. The' others; they' are; go' in; on her' own.

(c) Long sentences can be difficult to say fluently. Ask students to identify phrase groups.

e.g. He gets up / at 7 o'clock / and walks / to the station / to catch the train.

Practise building up the sentence phrase by phrase until the whole sentence can be said fluently.

Finally all these elements can be practised together by working on simple dialogues where the language content is familiar to the students. This means they can concentrate on good pronunciation.

A. Excuse me/I bought this yesterday/and it's got a mark on it.

B. Oh, I'm sorry./Would you like/to change it/for another one?

A. Yes, please.

B. Oh dear! I'm afraid/there aren't any more/in your size/in the same colour. Would you like a different colour?

A. No, thanks. I'd rather have my money back.

B. All right. I'll get you a refund.

A. Thank you.

In all pronunciation work the tape recorder is an invaluable aid. Not only can the student listen to the examples over and over again but s/he can record her/himself and compare her/his pronunciation with the examples.

References

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